* REGISTERED BY AUSTRALIAN POST
* PUBLICATIONS No: BNQ5736

Formally known as SOCCER WEEKLY

AUSTRALIAN & INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL

SOCCER WEEKLY

Vol. 30 No. 1434
Monday March 23, 2009

$3.00 GST INCLUSIVE

23/03 44

Culina's mind on the job - Page 3

Big guns fail in EPL action - Pages 11 & 12

EPL - Page 11

Italian Serie A - Page 21

Spanish La Liga - Page 23

German Bundesliga - Page 26

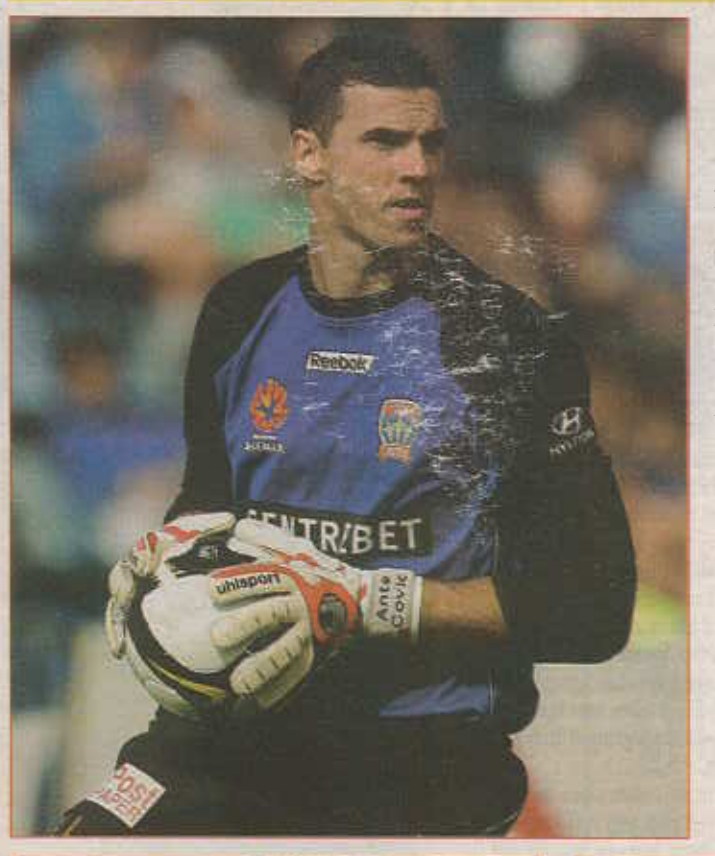
Dutch Eredivisie - Page 27

French Ligue 1 - Page 28

Greek Super League - Page 29

Asia - Page 10

Newcastle not releasing Covic?



BY CHRIS GEORGAKOPOULOS

The Newcastle Jets have decided to play hard ball with departing goalkeeper Ante Covic, not releasing him from his contract on technical terms.

Covic decided to leave the Jets after their 2-0 victory over Ulsay Hyundai in the AFC CHampions League, however Jets officials are not releasing him from his contract under what is known as the "webster ruling."

"He disqualified his contract by walking out on the club, so he's got to pay from now until the end of June whatever money we were going to pay him," Jets owner Con Constantine told the Newcastle Herald.

"He's got to pay that back to the club.

"When that happens . . . we as a club, even if we paid the super, and the bonus that according to him we owe, which I don't believe is true, he's still got to pay us another 20 grand.

"He won't get a release until he pays that money."

And in going one step further on the issue of the Socceroo goalkeeper, Constantine blamed Covic for a number of losses in the A-League season last year.

"He lost five or six games for us last year, and I never came out and said he's let down the club," Constantine said. "So he should respect the club, what we did for him."

He also said: "Isn't it amazing that someone like that can come out and accuse the club of all the dirty things in the world, knowing he let the club down, let his mates down . . . the bottom line is Ante Covic stands to give this club almost $20,000.

"The person who complained the most still owes the club $20,000. That's the bottom line."

TeleChoice Premier League Round 4 action - Page 4

Bosnich in line for Newcastle gig? - Page 5

Issue No. 1434
Monday, 23 March
F.L. Press P/L
40 Ricketty Street,
Mascot NSW 2020

ALL ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES

John Economos
Tel: (02) 9744 6984

Telephone
(editorial and general enquries)
Tel: (02) 9566 0500

EMAIL
(editorial, advertising and general enquries)
AIFSW's EMAIL
aifsw@foreignlanguage.com.au

FACSIMILE
(editorial, advertising and general enquiries)
(02) 9669 2302

MAILING ADDRESS
40 RICKETTY STREET,
MASCOT NSW 2020

EDITOR
Chris Georgakopoulos
LAYOUT/TYPESETTER
Mary Quartly
CORRESPONDENTS
John Economos (Sydney)
Joseph Carlucci (Sydney)
Alan Clark (Victoria)
Glenn Davis (Brisbane)
Richard Kreider (Perth)
Joe Russo (Sydney)
Caterina Polistina (Sydney)
Dion Rinaldo (South Australia)
Miles Allen-Scott (Sydney)

SCANNING
Chris Jiang
FILM PLANNING
Bill Hawthorne
PHOTOGRAPHY
-Getty Images

DISTRIBUTION NSW/ACT:
F.L. Press P/L 40 Ricketty St,
Mascot NSW 2020
Tel: (02) 9700 7455
Fax: (02) 9669 2302

VICTORIA:
F.L. Press P/L 72 Gipps Street,
Collingwood VIC 3066
Tel: (03) 9415 8588
Fax: (03) 9415 8944

SOUTH AUSTRALIA:
Jim Papadopoulos
143 Henley Beach Road,
Mile End S.A.
Tel: (08) 8352 2935

WESTERN AUSTRALIA:
Pan Hellenic Emporium,
67 James Street, Perth WA 6000
Tel: (08) 9328 4779

Recommended and maximum price.
*All material appearing in Australian and International Football Soccer Weekly is copyright and reproduction in any form whatsoever is expressly forbidden without the written permission of the publisher. The publisher accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, illustrations or photographic material.

Deadline for contributions, articles and advertising is 3 days PRIOR to issue date.

On the Ball

By Chris Georgakopoulos

Victory reject loan offer for Vargas

It can now be revealed that the Melbourne Victory have rejected a loan offer from Chinese side Dalian Shide for central defender Rodrigo Vargas.

Vargas was sought after by the Chinese club to fill their AFC players spots and was to bolster the sides defence for seven and a half months.

However, the Victory are determined to prepare in the best way possible for next season's AFC Champions League, and want all their star players under their wings.

More news from Dalian Shide, and it is said that Daniel Severino has not signed for the club as we reported last week. We will have more on this issue next week.

Melbourne Victory to begin pre-season in China

More news on the Victory, and we have been informed that the A-League champions will begin their pre-season with a tour to China.

A training camp in Tianjin has been mooted by club officials along with two or three matches and would take place prior

to the A-League's Pre-Season Cup which begins on July 18.

After a stellar season in which they trumped the three trophies on offer in Australia, the Victory will take part in the ACL in 2010 and see acclimatisation as a major part of performing well on the Asian stage.

"Having qualified for the ACL, it would be good experience for the squad and we're looking at it seriously," Victory coach Ernie Merrick said.

Roda Antar joins Shandong, Fyfe doesn't

Iain Fyfe has not joined Shandong Luneng on a loan deal with Lebanese national captain Roda Antar taking up the final position in the squad.

Antar has joined Shandong from German Bundesliga side FC Koln in what is the biggest move to the Chinese league of the season.

The multimillion dollar deal has seen the possibility of Iain Fyfe joining the team diminish and he will after all play for Adelaide United next season.

Triantis re-joins Sydney Olympic

Sydney FC youth team captain Chris Triantis has re-joined Sydney Olympic in the Telechoice Premier League for the majority of the 2009 season.

It had been rumored that Triantis was trialing with the Central Coast Mariners previously, however has obviously failed in his quest.

AIFSW wishes him all the best back at Sydney Olympic and hopefully we see him in the colors of Sydney FC again.

Mariners sign Sheffield Utd youngster Quinn

Central Coast Mariners have taken Sheffield United midfielder Keith Quinn on-loan.

The youngster is set for a 'work experience' spell with the Mariners as he was not signed in time to register for the Asian Champions League.

"Keith is 20 now and this is the stage in his career when he should be breaking into the team, so hopefully he can do well in Australia, maybe come back to Bramall Lane ... and get a look in," brother Stephen told the Evening Herald.

Perth Glory boss Mitchell wants Derby's Sterjovski

Perth Glory boss Dave Mitchell is keen on Derby County striker Mile Sterjovski.

"I've got a good relationship with him and I did speak to him and we've had negotiations about the possibility, if Derby let him go, about coming here," Mitchell said.

"Going over there and talking to him will be ideal.

"I know the character of the player and he's a very good player.

"It'd be nice to get a marquee player, but you've got to make sure you get the right marquee player."

Zola keen on Neill stay

West Ham boss Gianfranco Zola insists Lucas Neill has been value for money since arriving from Blackburn and will be worth every penny when a new contract is agreed.

Neill caused a stir when he arrived at Upton Park because he turned down Liverpool and was on high wages at his new club - but it has turned into a productive move for the Hammers and the Australian.

The 31-year-old, who helped the club survive relegation and is now attempting to get them into Europe, has relished his role as skipper and has organised days out for the squad to help team spirit.

"Lucas has been huge for this club since he came," Zola said. "When he came the club was suffering a little bit, since his arrival he has been fantastic and he still is, he's very good on the pitch and he's excellent off the pitch with the players.

"We have been go-karting all together and then for dinner all together. He organises activities where the players can bond with each other."

Neill is out of contract in the northern summer but fortunately for Zola he has said he wants to stay at the club.

"The club is speaking to him and hopefully they will find a solution," Zola said.

"As far as I'm concerned, he is one of the players who is worth all this money. I'm pleased and that's why I'm very, very keen to renew his contract."

Neill has been cast as a mercenary, but Zola added: "I know him and he doesn't look like that. He cares very much. Not only about the football, he creates a good atmosphere with the players.

"He's excellent and I have the utmost respect for him."

Culina's mind on the job

Skipper-in-waiting Jason Culina has yet to board a plane for the next phase of his career on the Gold Coast but the mind of the Socceroos midfielder is already there, plotting a way to instil a winning mentality among his new United teammates to back up the boasts of the cub's billionaire boss Clive Palmer.

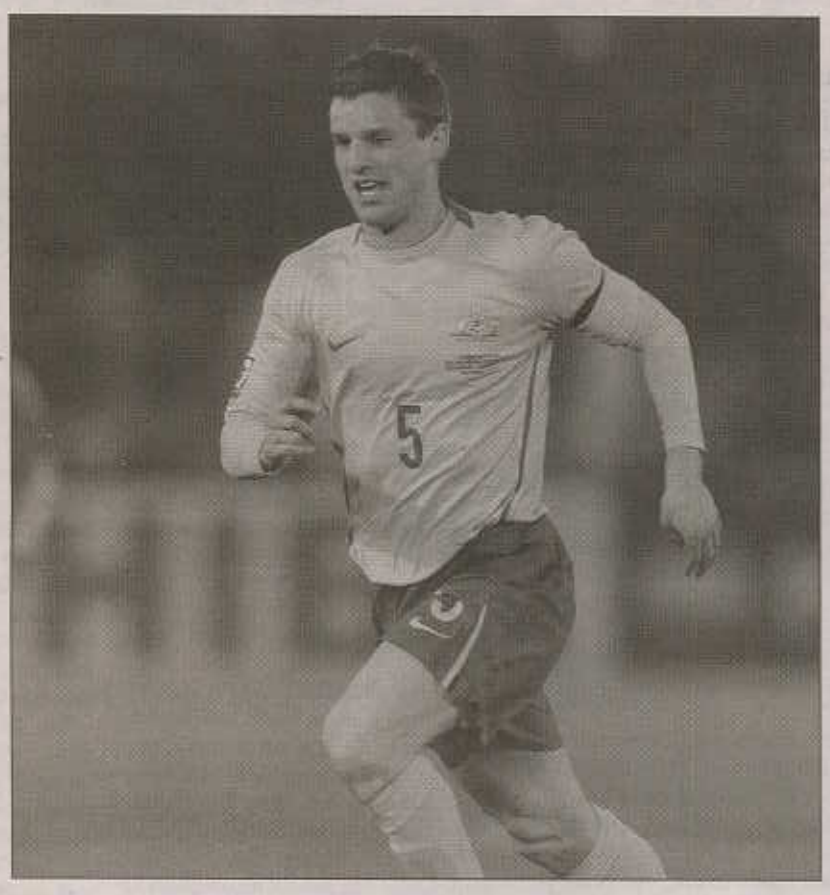
With his 10-year Dutch odyssey almost over, the Socceroos and PSV Eindhoven ace is already scheming and dreaming of a debut season of deliverance for the competition's new, and undisputed, barons of bling.

United's marquee signing is relishing the extra pressure and responsibility that comes with a deal worth $3.3 million over three years.

"At PSV I've won three titles, played numerous Champions League and UEFA Cup games and the feeling in the dressing room has always been, 'How much are we going to win by this week?' rather than 'Are you we going to win'.

"That's a great feeling to have before you even go onto the field and it's something I'd love to see at the Gold Coast.

"As captain, I plan to instil that mindset into the players in every way I can, not only in A-League games but also in training sessions."



Jason Culina in action for the Socceroos

Culina, who will win his 38th cap for Australia against Uzbekistan at Sydney's ANZ Stadium on April 1, has no regrets or recriminations as he prepares to bid Europe adieu in early June.

"It was always my goal to play in one of the biggest clubs in Europe and also some of its biggest competitions and I've been lucky enough to achieve that," he explained.

"In addition to the success I've had at club level I've also played at the Olympics for Australia and the World Cup and I'm super satisfied with how things have gone. In truth, it's been a dream come true."

Fulfilling the dreams of iron-ore entrepreneur Palmer, a man with aspirations of instant A-League glory, is Culina's next big target – other than qualifying' for South Africa 2010.

"He has big plans for the club and is right to aspire to be the best, that's what we're all aiming for," Culina emphasised. "If it puts pressure on us, it will be a productive kind of pressure.

"Over the years in Europe, I've developed a desire to win everything I take part in. It becomes a part of you and the hunger is still there for me, just as strong as ever."

With Australia on the brink of sealing their place at a second successive World Cup, Culina added: "It's a bit early to be celebrating just yet because Uzbekistan are a lot better than some people think. But we will have eight days in camp to prepare and to be honest we are due for a good display.

"You will see something very different to Japan, where we were very defensive in drawing 0-0 there and also to Bahrain, where we were a bit fortunate to win 1-0.

"We want to give the fans something to celebrate. We'll be out to score goals, like we always do at home and I think we'll be fit, hopefully at full-strength and able to do the job.

"To be so close to qualifying with four group games left is beyond anything we ever imagined."

Culina is keen to close down the debate over whether his return to play in the A-League will impinge on his Socceroos prospects, following coach Pim Verbeek's recent disparaging remarks over the quality of the domestic competition.

"I haven't spoken to Pim lately, and if there was a problem I'm sure he would have been in touch," Culina said.

"There are no issues at all as far as I'm concerned. Like I've said before I'm sure the level of my game won't slide at all in returning to play in Australia – I'm going to make quite sure of that."

DUSAN PURAC FOOTBALL ACADEMY

World acclaimed for boys and girls
We organise trials with European Clubs
In Partnership with our
FIFA agents throughout Europe.

Highly recommended by FIFA

Leading world skills Master Coach
Dusan 'Darcy' Purac
MON-FRI 6PM-8PM
SUN 10AM-12NOON

SYDNEYWIDE
• Phone: (02) 9949 5247 • Mobile: 0418 263 644

dusanpurac@hotmail.com
www.dusanpurac.com

Genova International Soccer Schools

GENOVA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER SCHOOLS is an Italian Football company managed by ex European player, Morris Pagniello also the founder/director of GISS world-wide.

As well, Mr Pagniello represents As Roma schools in Asia, Oceania and North America.

One of GISS's important programmes is to run a two week pre-season (July 2009) Italian trial games for any players that do not have international contacts.

This particular programme has now been running for two years and has seen many professional players from Italy and elsewhere abroad participate.

Morris Pagniello stated to this paper:

"I think this would have to be the most exciting project that GISS runs in Italy, and its very exciting to see Aussie players play amongst, and against, some of the World's best.

"They get the opportunity to compete against teams such as Fiorentina, Bologna, Atalanta, Chievo as the list goes on.

"All our players graded receive equal game time whilst getting coached by former Serie A players/coaches which is a massive experience.

"Apart from all this, our players have the significant possibility to be signed up by some interested club in Italy where there are more than 280 professional teams.

"GISS has registered agents/scouts from clubs all over Europe and games are televised Live.

"The ratio of a player-signing from these tours is around 50%.

"As well, GISS provides Football Management for any participating player".

For further detailed information, please visit **www.issgneova.com** or email **enquiries@issgenova.com**

Genova International Soccer Schools vs Bologna

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO PLAY PRO FOOTBALL?

3rd International Italian Professional pre-season tour/trials

Be a part of this Chance of a life-time opportunity:

* 2 weeks of intense training coached by Italian UEFA A qualified staff
* 6 Official pre-season 1st teams games against serie A and B teams
* Only 12 players from Australia will be selected

forward your C.V to
franco.parisi@issgenova.com

1300 793 505
www.issgenova.com

GENOVA
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF SOCCER

TeleChoice Premier League Round 4

Marconi Stallions 2
Bankstown City Lions ..2

Player/Manager Peter Tsekenis scored Bankstown City Lions' opening goal in their 2-2 draw against the Marconi Stallions

Marconi had so many chances to win but didn't, while Bankstown - severely deplete through injury - made the most of their opportunities. And, as the old cliché goes: 'That's football.'

In the 6' minute of play a lovely cross from Abbas Al-Hilfi found Ben Vidaic, but unfortunately for the Stallions his powerful finish was turned away for a corner by a diving Andrew Bazi in goal.

The home side's supporters didn't have to wait too long because in the 12' minute Richard Luksic scored a classic own goal in a sliding attempt to deviate the ball away from a Marconi attacker after a nice cross from Alexander Canak.

The Marconi faithful had hardly finished clapping when Vidaic tucked away into the bottom right corner of the net a second goal.

It was all too easy for the former Sydney FC striker who was given far too much time and space by the Bankstown defence.

It was all one-way traffic at this point and it appeared that there was very little that the visitors could do to stem the flow of the game.

Marconi were relentless and it was again the Al-Hilfi and Vidaic combination that sent shivers through the Bankstown defence, but the latter could only test the goalkeeper from the former's cross and nothing eventuated despite a spill from Bazi.

Bankstown at this point were totally outgunned by the pace of the Marconi team and Kader Toure thought that he would try his luck from just outside the box only to shoot over the intended target.

However, in the 37' minute it all changed for Bankstown when Suad Ameti sent a free-kick into the box from the left and Tsekenis, with a nice header, steered the ball into the bottom right-hand corner of the net to bring the visitors right back into the game.

Right on the stroke of half-time Luksic with a powerful strike from some 30-metres almost squared the ledger, but his excellent attempt was just wide of the goal.

Marconi entered the arena after the break with even more determination even though a lot of credit must also go to Bankstown who continually thwarted the Stallions.

At the other end Ibrahim Haydar danced his way past two Marconi defenders, but was denied by a very good save from James Chronopoulos who turned the ball away for a corner. From the following corner kick Hussein Salameh fired in a rocket that only narrowly went over the goal.

It was another corner in the 61' minute that led to Marconi's downfall: Alexander Canak blocked the ball with his hand and it was a clear penalty.

Salameh made no mistake from the spot to completely send Chronopoulos the wrong way.

Canak, however, tried to make up for his error shortly afterwards but could only find the side netting and in the 83' minute he narrowly missed the goal with a delightful shot after an equally delightful run.

Hussein Akil, who had only been on the field for about half an hour, was given his second yellow card in the 85' minute for a foul on Toure and there could be no argument with Mr Alex Glasgow's spot-on decision to send him early to the sheds.

Marconi couldn't capitalise on their numeric advantage even though right on the stroke of fulltime they almost stole a victory when Tim McGowan entered the box flying onto a brilliant through ball from Al-Hilfi, but once again Bazi was there to prevent the home side from snatching a win.

Blacktown City Demons .2
West Sydney Berries ...1

Blacktown City Demons' rising star Chris Bedzo was the standout in his side's 2-1 victory over the West Sydney Berries

The Blacktown City Demons recorded their first win of the season on Saturday evening, scoring an upset 2-1 victory over the West Sydney Berries during a scrappy affair at Lidcombe Oval.

The home side were stunned just four minutes into the match, Chris Bedzo catching out a flat-footed Berries defence with a looping ball into the penalty area, Bedzo with the time to finish under the onrushing Hamish McLean at the far post.

The simplicity and directness of the goal would have concerned new West Sydney manager John Calleja, Blacktown City all-too often finding space in-behind an immobile Berries back-line.

Lacking intensity, West Sydney almost went two goals down just four minutes later courtesy of an air-swing inside the area, the ball falling to the feet of Ellis again at the far post with McLean this time producing a crucial stop from close-range.

A relatively open start to the match then saw veteran Berries captain Aheleas Kotsopoulos burst down the left before sending a cross in along the floor for Luke Austin, the striker seeing his effort deflected wide on the turn.

It was a rare display of attacking cohesion though, as Blacktown began to sit deep and operate cn the counter, a tactic at which they seemed particularly adept against Marconi last week.

The Demons lost that match 3-0 after being reduced to ten men during the first-half, though their discipline at Lidcombe Oval was beginning to frustrate their opponents.

With Chris Bedzo's mobility in particular unsettling the Berries, the likes of Akwasi Agyei began to profit from the high defensive line being played by the hosts.

He should have extended Blacktown's lead in the 36' minute, stealing the ball from the last line of defence before racing into the penalty area with ease, shaping to shoot past McLean but being denied by a superb last-ditch challenge by Jack Sobczyk.

After a first-half devoid of any real sustained quality from either side in possession, it was the Berries who carved out the first half-chance of the second period; Kosta Lagoudakis hitting the by-line but seeing his cut-back hacked clear.

Otherwise untroubled defensively, Blacktown then doubled their lead after another defensive lapse by the Berries on 65' minutes.

A simple ball rolled into the penalty-area found the unmarked Ante Deur, who had time to both turn and place his shot past McLean to give Blacktown a 2-0 lead.

Somehow though the Berries managed to produce a goal on 76' minutes, substitute John Fotiadis' early ball into the box only headed to the edge of the area from where Kotsopoulos volleyed home superbly into the back of the net.

Blacktown substitute Nick Sama then had a wonderful chance to score against his old club in injury-time, forcing his way through the Berries defence before finding himself alone with McLean at an angle and chipping the ball audaciously over the crossbar.

For all of their late grafting however, the Berries were unable to produce what would have been an unjust equaliser after failing to break dov n their opponents throughout the match.

Sutherland Sharks 2
Sydney United 2

Sydney United striker Luka Glavas scored his fourth goal in the TeleChoice Premier League against the Sutherland Sharks on Saturday

In a match that started at breakneck speed, and with both sides missing key members from their respective line-ups, if anyone thought this was going to a non event they clearly didn't look at the history of this fixture in recent seasons and the combatants taking part.

However it was the Sharks who bit first when in the 8' minute Jimmy Bakis sent in an innocuous looking free-kick that managed to find its way through a sea of bodies and nestle into the back of the net with Vedran Janjetovic totally unsighted and wrong footed. Bakis has, and will, hit sweeter efforts without such fortune during this campaign but fortune favours the brave.

With United reeling from this setback it was still somewhat unbelievable that the Sharks again struck 3' minutes later when Nathan Ralph set off on a dizzying run down the right and beating three United defenders before sending over a tantalising cross which was met by Matt Hall to head home unmarked which beggared belief with such tall timber at the back for the visitors in captain Joe Vrkic and Damon Collina in the heart of defence. In fact, Hall was certainly in contention for 'Man of the Match' honours until other matters took their course for his running, battling and dogged determination.

Sutherland had what was believed to be a commanding lead though after much soul searching, Sydney United got back into the game when Luka Glavas netted from the spot after just 13' minutes of play when Sharks captain George Souris was adjudged to have handled in the box.

It was an electric start to the match and most evident the pace couldn't possibly continue for the full 90'minutes and as United began to soar into the ascendancy it was a surprise they were not back on level terms sooner with Glavas having several more chances but none so flashy as the bicycle kick he attempted on the half hour that was only marginally misjudged. David Zdrilic then saw his glancing header narrowly wide of the post not long after.

It was a combination of Zdrilic, again with a header, who set up Milicic for a chance that was blocked bravely only for the ball to fall at the feet of Dominic Rossi some 25-yards out; but his effort was way wide of the mark as he had only the opportunity to snatch at the chance.

It was luck that kept the visitors out in the 54' minute when Glavas ran on to a through ball and hit a cross shot back toward the goalkeeper's right hand post with Nathan Denham beaten only to see it glance back into play off the upright and inches wide of Mitchell Thompson following in.

The signs were there that United were in no mood to leave empty handed and all the hard work came to nought on 55' minutes when Milicic produced a goal of such quality it must surely be part of the 'Goal of the Season' highlights package. The ball came out to the striker on the edge of the box and he showed his experience by powerfully placing his shot through the crowded defence leaving Denham no chance and levelling the game.

The Sharks were not sitting back and indeed had two goals disallowed but the bitterest pill was still to be swallowed when in the 90' minute Neil Jablonski was felled in the box by Collina and referee Kurt Ams had no qualms in pointing straight to the spot.

Jablonski took the spot kick himself but Janjetovic was equal to the effort and flung himself to the right to parry the effort and retain parity on the night.

Bonnyrigg WE 1
Penrith Nepean Utd 1

Bonnyrigg White Eagles and Penrith-Nepean United played out an entertaining 1-1 draw at Bonnyrigg Sports Club; the visitors denying the White Eagles their first win of the season.

In the end, Blagoja Kuleski's men secured their first point of the campaign as Almir Dizdaric's 'go-ahead' goal was matched by Penrith-Nepean's Mitchell Long.

An even start to the encounter, whereby neither midfield allowed their opponent the chance to penetrate, was brought to life by the visitors on 7' minutes. A promising forward foray was brought to an end by some tough White Eagles defending, the referee awarding Penrith-Nepean a free-kick. Tayfun Buyukkopru's free-kick, from a very promising position, lacked precision though, and the ball finished over the crossbar.

The White Eagles' dominance of possession through the middle of the park did not translate into chances early as it was again the visitors to threaten Ali Akbal's goal. Petratos, with his back to goal, played a ball into the path of Andrew Lazarou who hit his snap-shot effort over the crossbar.

The White Eagles midfield pairing of Nathan Rivera and Nikola Zonjic combined well to release Steven Bozinovski down the right-flank; Bozinovski's cross into the penalty-area failed to pick out a teammate.

Antonio Faria had a golden opportunity to hit the home-side ahead just prior to the break following a failed clearance by the Penrith-Nepean defence. Faria got a good look at goal, though some desperate defending by the Penrith-Nepean rear-guard saw the effort thwarted.

Dizdaric scuffed Bonnyrigg's last chance of the opening half in injury-time when he received a perfectly floated Zonjic cross from the right. Dizdaric's header, from close-range, was sent over Schwarzer's crossbar.

Following the break Bonnyrigg found their goal via a dead-ball situation. A Nathan Rivera corner from the right picked out Dizdaric, who rose highest, to head into the back of the net.

The goal spurred the home-side into action with Rivera and then Gurbuz involved in promising forays up-field, though a second goal was not coming.

Penrith-Nepean's Sean Mitchell picked up a loose ball on the edge of the penalty-area on 29' minutes before unleashing a venomous drive on goal; the effort stinging the palms of Akbal who tipped over the crossbar.

The resulting corner caused the White Eagles rear-guard with discomfort as they failed to clear the ball. Mitchell Long's effort on goal was punched clear by Akbal – off the line – though the linesman quickly raised his flag to signal a goal.

With their lead gone, the White Eagles showed a lack of confidence in the final 15' minutes, as the visiting Penrith-Nepean finished the encounter strongest.

Daniel Willoughby almost sent Bonnyrigg back in-front with a curling free-kick; the effort beat the wall, and goalkeeper, though finished agonizingly wide for the home crowd.

Bonnyrigg defender Milan Zoric denied Sean Mitchell a definite one-on-one situation as the defender cleverly anticipated the striker with a clean challenge inside the penalty-area.

The final chance of the match fell to Penrith-Nepean's Buyukkopru who had time on the ball at the edge of the penalty-area; the attacking midfielder picked his spot though poorly executed the finish as the ball cleared the crossbar.

Next Fixtures:

Saturday 28th March

Penrith Nepean United vs Sydney Olympic
Manly United FC vs Bonnyrigg White Eagles

Sunday 29th March

Blacktown City vs Sydney Tigers
Bankstown City vs West Sydney Berries
Wollongong FC vs Sutherland Sharks
Sydney United vs Marconi Stallions

TeleChoice Premier league Table

		P	W	D	L	For	Ag	GD	Pts
1	Sydney United	4	3	1	0	7	2	5	10
2	Marconi Stallions	4	2	2	0	8	3	5	8
3	Bankstown City	4	2	1	1	7	5	2	7
4	Penrith Nepean United	4	1	2	1	4	5	-1	5
5	West Sydney Berries	3	1	1	1	6	5	1	4
6	Blacktown City	4	1	1	2	2	7	-5	4
7	Sydney Tigers	3	1	0	2	6	4	2	3
8	Wollongong FC	3	1	0	2	3	4	-1	3
9	Sydney Olympic	2	1	0	1	3	4	-1	3
10	Sutherland Sharks	4	0	3	1	4	6	-2	3
11	Manly United FC	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2
12	Bonnyrigg White Eagles	3	0	1	2	4	9	-5	1

Australia Need Mile Jedinak – Pim Verbeek

Australia boss Pim Verbeek says that he needs Turkey-based midfielder Mile Jedinak for the upcoming World Cup qualifier against Uzbekistan at ANZ Stadium on April 1, after he was included in the Dutchman's 22-man squad.

Mile Jedinak in action for the Socceroos

The former South Korea coach spoke at a press conference in Sydney, where this week he will start to prepare his side for the next step on their path to South Africa 2010.

Verbeek told Goal.com immediately after the conference that he had been impressed with Jedinak's form for club side Genclerbirligi.

The 24-year-old seems to be an important figure in the Socceroos manager's plans, and the absence of Blackburn Rovers midfielder Vince Grella has added weight to whispers that he may be chosen to play from the start.

"He is doing well, I need him in the mid-field since Grella is not there," Verbeek said.

The 53-year-old is also looking to the future; with Jedinak's fellow Turkish club team-mates Bruce Djite and James Troisi getting regular game time, the Dutchman seems to want to protect their place in the team.

He continued, "Troisi and Djite are on the stand-by list.

"I'm not willing to take those players away from their clubs because we are happy that they are starting players.

"To take them away from their clubs if they have no chance to make the final 18 will be difficult for them.

"They know what they have to do, we are in contact with them, they know they are in the spotlight.

"We think it's better for them to try and make their place in the team, rather than take them away for 10 days and then have them sit in the stands."

Leijer to go under knife

On-loan Norwich defender Adrian Leijer will have surgery at the end of the season.

The Fulham man joined Norwich on a loan deal earlier this month and has managed to break into the Canaries first team.

However, he will opt for surgery on his troublesome knee come seasons end rather than push through and try to make Socceroos selection.

"I'm not thinking about Socceroos at the moment," the 22-year old told AAP.

"My main focus is trying to break-through in Europe and hopefully I'll get my (international) break at some stage.

"I'd love to play for the Socceroos but it's something at this stage that is further down the track.

"I've been carrying a knee injury for quite some time and as soon as the season is finished I'm going to get that cleaned out," he added.

"That'll rule me out of those Socceroos games. It's an important thing to do to try and get rid of it for good. A decent break will be good physically and mentally."

Unpaid super gives Newcastle players sour taste

The Professional Footballers Association has revealed A-League club Newcastle Jets have failed to pay the entire playing staff superannuation and bonuses.

The payments date back to the start of the financial year and are believed to total $100,000.

Recently departed goalkeeper Ante Covic said it left a sour taste in his mouth when he left the club this week to join Swedish club Elfsborg.

Jets owner Con Constantine does not deny the unpaid dues and said they would all be sorted in the near future but PFA chief executive Brendan Schwab said it is not the first time Newcastle have performed this type of practice.

"The thing with the [Newcastle] club is it's a difficult club to deal with," Schwab said yesterday.

"Normally when we have a series of outstanding payments, we have some concerns about the club undergoing some financial problems.

"Unfortunately this club, under its leadership, has a practice of deliberately delaying payments and making payments at a time which most suits it, irrespective of the impact it has on players.

"I think that's why, unfortunately, the club has struggled to create the high-performance environment that's necessary to maintain the elite level of performance."

Mark Bosnich is being realistic about playing football again

Vacancy at Newcastle not necessarily made for Bosnich

Mark Bosnich has the hunger and desire back required to play professional football but is unsure where he will land.

The 37-year old made a comeback to the game during the season with a guest stint for Central Coast Mariners and then continued to train with Sydney FC and feels he is ready to resume his career.

With an opening at Newcastle Jets after the departure of Ante Covic, it seems a logical option but the club has decided to promote youngster Ben Kennedy for the remainder of the Asian Champions League and if he acquits himself will get the number one gig.

Bosnich says he is chomping at the bit but is unsure which direction he will head.

"After being away for so long, I'm just revelling in it," Bosnich said.

"I'm thankful to Sydney and to Kossie [former coach John Kosmina] for letting me train here. The only thing missing now is games.

"The time with the Central Coast reinvigorated my hunger, and I feel young again.

"My plans are basically just to play again, wherever that might be anywhere around the world, I don't really mind. I'd like to play in Australia, of course, and I think I could do a lot of good here.

"But if I don't get a phone call from anyone, and there's no one that wants to give me an opportunity, I completely understand and I'll have to reassess. I've got to be realistic."

25-player squad chosen for Young Socceroos camp

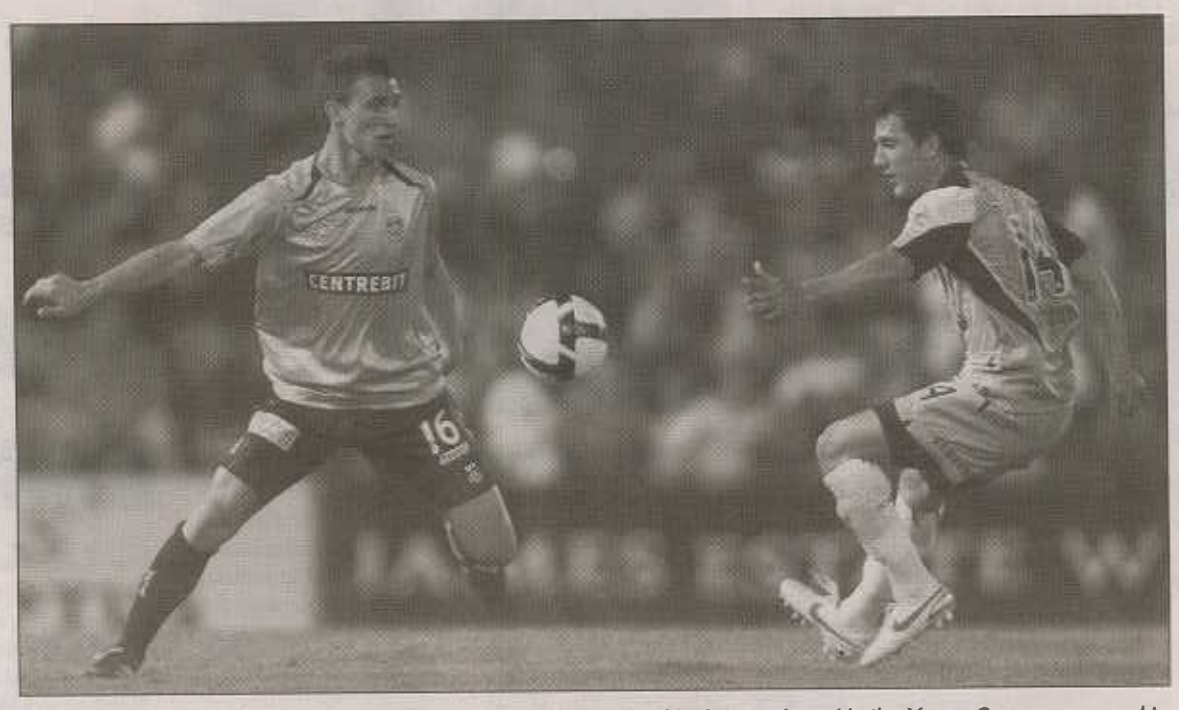
Young Socceroos Head Coach Jan Versleijen has selected a 25-player squad for a training camp at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra from Monday 23 - Friday 27 March as part of his team's preparation for the upcoming FIFA U-20 World Cup.

Mitch Nichols will return to Canberra having collected his first Qantas Socceroo cap against Kuwait earlier this month, along with Ben Kantarovski who was part of the same Socceroos squad, but did not take the field.

Jason Hoffman returns to the squad having missed the AFC U-19 Championships last year through injury, whilst Mark Birighitti, Matthew Theodore, Sean Rooney, Chris Payne, Brodie Mooy, Rhyan Grant, Kofi Danning, Josh McVey, Jason Davidson, Luke Bratten and Osama Malik all receive their first call up for the Qantas Young Socceroos.

The majority of the squad have been selected from the Hyundai A-League and National Youth League playing ranks with the exception of Jason Davidson who plays for Hume City in the Victorian Premier League having recently returned to Australia after playing in Japan for Seiritsu Gakuen (JEF United feeder club). Jason's father is former Socceroo Alan Davidson who played 51 A-Internationals in the Green and Gold from 1980-1991 and was also a Young Socceroo in 1979.

"This is the first training camp that we will have together since qualifying for the World Cup," said Versleijen.



Fresh from being a part of the Socceroos squad, Ben Kantarovski has been selected in the Young Socceroos squad to attend a training camp in Canberra next week

"I have also invited some new players into the camp to see how they can fit in and possibly add something new and different to the group.

"It is a little over 6 months from the first match of the tournament and we will be looking to make a selection then build on that selection for our campaign.

"We will be holding more training camps in the coming months in Australia and overseas which will also include the foreign-based players to help strengthen the playing group," concluded Versleijen.

The Qantas Young Socceroos qualified for the 2009 FIFA U-20 World Cup by progressing to the semi-final stage at the AFC U-19 Championships in Saudi Arabia last year.

24-nations will compete at this year's tournament which will be held in Egypt from 24 September to 16 October. Australia, Korea Republic, United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan will be representing Asia, while Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa coming from Africa along with the host nation Egypt. European qualifiers are the Czech Republic, England, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Spain, whilst Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela will be there from South America and Tahiti will represent Oceania.

The official draw for the FIFA U-20 World Cup Egypt 2009 will be held at Luxor, Egypt on Sunday 5th April at 8pm (4am AEST Monday 6th April).

Young Socceroos Squad List

AIS Training Camp, Canberra, ACT
23 - 27 March 2009

Mark Birighitti (Adelaide United), Luke Brattan (Queensland Roar), James Brown (Gold Coast United), Isaka Cernak (Queensland Roar), Kofi Danning (Sydney FC), Jason Davidson (Hume City, VPL), Luke DeVere (Queensland Roar), Nathan Elasi (Melbourne Victory), Rhyan Grant (Sydney FC), Jason Hoffman (Newcastle Jets), Matthew Jurman (Sydney FC), Ben Kantarovski (Newcastle Jets), Osama Malik (Adelaide United), Joshua McVey (Queensland Roar), Tahj Minniecon (Queensland Roar), Brodie Mooy (Newcastle Jets), Sam Munro (Sydney FC), Mitch Nichols (Queensland Roar), Thomas Oar (Queensland Roar), Chris Payne (Sydney FC), Andrew Redmayne (Central Coast Mariners), Sean Rooney (Newcastle Jets), Sebastian Ryall (Melbourne Victory), Matthew Theodore (Melbourne Victory), Nik Tsattalios (Newcastle Jets).

McKay makes China loan move

Queensland Roar midfielder Matt McKay is the latest A-League player to look to further his career in Asia after signing a four-month loan deal with Chinese Super League club Changchun Yatai.

McKay cut short an end-of-season trip to Thailand with teammates last week to seal the deal with the 2007 CSL champions.

A three-day trip to China where he spoke with club officials and passed a medical was all it took to convince the Socceroos midfielder the time was right to make the move overseas.

"I jumped at the chance to keep playing," McKay said. "I'm at a good age now where you want to continue your football.

"With a 21-game season, you don't get much involvement in terms of a full season as you do in playing Europe.

"This is the first chance for me to further my development with a club overseas, so it will be a new experience and hopefully something that will help me when I get back."

McKay has taken full part in Australia's past two Asian Cup qualifiers and follows Sydney FC striker Mark Bridge and Socceroos defender Mark Milligan in moving to China.

Bridge joined Tianjin Teda on loan for the ACL campaign while Milligan left Newcastle Jets at the end of the A-League season to join Shanghai Shenhua on a three-year contract.

Queensland influential midfielder Matt McKay has joined Changchun Yatai on a loan deal

McKay admitted future national representation played a part in his decision to swap the sunny skies of Brisbane for the chilly climes of Changchun in China's north-east.

"I think in the games coming up (Socceroos coach) Pim Verbeek will use European-based players, but obviously if you are training and playing still you are a chance," he said.

"The boys in the A-League that aren't playing probably won't have that opportunity."

McKay is expected back in Brisbane ahead of the 2009 A-League season in July.

Tassie's mystery sheikh revealed

The world's 43rd richest person, Mohammed Hussein Ali Al Amoudi, has been named as the money man being courted by officials of Tasmania United FC who are bidding to become an A-League team.

The club's football director Ken Morton refused on Tuesday to confirm or deny reports of any negotiations about Al Amoudi becoming its Roman Abramovich.

The difference between Chelsea's Russian owner Abramovich and Mohammed Al Amoudi in terms of net wealth is about $US500 million ($A758 million) in the sheikh's favour.

Tasmania United FC bid boss John McGirr let slip about "a sheikh" at a news conference in Hobart on Monday, saying he could become the proposed club's sole sponsor: "Just like (Roman) Abramovich at Chelsea".

The sheikh's name was revealed by the Mercury newspaper on Tuesday.

Morton said on Tuesday a meeting with "a businessman" - he will able to name soon - is being arranged after promising preliminary sponsorship talks.

"We have a businessman, who is up there in the rich list and is interested in football, and the first indications are that this proposal seems interesting to him," Morton said.

Earlier this year Forbes magazine ranked Al Amoudi as the 43rd richest person in the world with a net worth of $US9 billion ($A13.64 billion).

His father is Yemeni and his mother is Ethiopian. He immigrated to Saudi Arabia in 1965 and became a Saudi citizen.

Al Amoudi made his fortune in construction and real estate before branching out to buy oil refineries in Sweden and Morocco.

Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich is the 51st richest man in the world with a net worth of $US8.5 billion ($A12.89 billion), according to Forbes.

The cost of becoming Tasmania's Abramovich is $A6 million over three years.

Other revenue streams make up the $A7.5 million per year cost of running the team who could play their home games in front of a large, covered grandstand across an end of Bellerive Oval.

Gold Coast and North Queensland Fury will join the A-League next season, making it a 10-team competition.

McGirr said the 11th licence has gone to a Melbourne bid.

Tasmania United FC will go up against bids from Sydney, Wollongong and Canberra for the 12th A-League licence.

Harry Kewell has been named to return for the Socceroos against Uzbekistan in April

Verbeek names squad for all-important Uzbekistan clash

Socceroos Head Coach Pim Verbeek has selected 22 players for the upcoming 2010 FIFA World Cup Asian group qualifier round 4 match against Uzbekistan in Sydney on Wednesday 1 April 2009.

Harry Kewell returns to the Socceroos squad having missed the last 2010 FIFA World Cup against Japan through injury, whilst Michael Beauchamp, Jacob Burns and Adam Federici will also join the Qantas Socceroo squad for the first time this year. Vincenzo Grella and Craig Moore are the only two players from the team that drew 0-0 against Japan who have not been selected in the current squad due to injury.

The Socceroos are currently at the top of Group A of the 2010 FIFA World Cup Asian Qualifiers (10points), with Japan second (8 pts) followed by Bahrain (4 pts), Qatar (4pts) and Uzbekistan (1pt).

Before heading to Sydney, Uzbekistan will host Qatar in Tashkent on Saturday 28 March, whilst Japan and Bahrain meet in Saitama City, Japan on the same day.

SOCCEROOS SQUAD

Michael BEAUCHAMP - Aalborg BK, DENMARK - 18 (1)

Mark BRESCIANO - U.S. Citta di Palermo, ITALY - 47 (11)

Jacob BURNS - FC Unirea Valahorum, ROMANIA - 9 (0)

Tim CAHILL - Everton, ENGLAND - 31 (14)

David CARNEY - Sheffield United FC, ENGLAND - 18 (1)

Scott CHIPPERFIELD - FC Basel, SWITZERLAND - 59 (12)

Chris COYNE - Colchester United FC, ENGLAND - 5 (0)

Jason CULINA - PSV Eindhoven, HOLLAND - 37 (1)

Adam FEDERICI - Reading FC, ENGLAND - 0

Richard GARCIA - Hull City FC, ENGLAND - 3 (0)

Brett HOLMAN - AZ Alkmaar, HOLLAND - 22 (1)

Mile JEDINAK - Genclerbirligi SK, TURKEY - 3 (0)

Josh KENNEDY - Karlsruher SC, GERMANY - 11 (5)

Harry KEWELL - Galatasaray SK, TURKEY - 38 (12)

Scott McDONALD - Celtic FC, SCOTLAND - 10 (0)

Lucas NEILL - West Ham United FC, ENGLAND - 47 (0)

Jade NORTH - Incheon United FC, KOREA REPUBLIC - 23 (0)

Michael PETKOVIC - Sivasspor, TURKEY - 6 (0)

Mark SCHWARZER - Fulham FC, ENGLAND - 64 (0)

Mile STERJOVSKI - Derby County FC, ENGLAND - 39 (7)

Carl VALERI - U.S. Grosseto FC, ITALY - 15 (0)

Luke WILKSHIRE - FK Dinamo Moscow, RUSSIA - 32 (0)

Smeltz may still head abroad

Gold Coast United coach Miron Bleiberg admits he could lose goal glutton Shane Smeltz to a cashed-up European club before he even gets to line up for the A-League expansion outfit.

With the scouts and agents on the prowl at June's Confederations Cup, Bleiberg is preying New Zealand international Smeltz is more ordinary than awe-inspiring when he lines up against the world's top ranked team Spain, hosts South Africa and 2007 Asian Cup winners Iraq in the group stage.

Should the 12-goal A-League Player of the Year shimmer, it could be bye-bye for the striker who was the subject of failed bids from Turkish outfits Genclerberligi and Hacettepe before the ink on his United contract had even dried.

"Shane is a class act, and if he draws attention to himself in South Africa then we could find ourselves with another bid for him, and this time it might come from a source where it would be hard to turn down," Bleiberg said.

"That final decision of course rests with owner Clive Palmer and he is isn't a man who has to sell anybody if he chooses not to.

"But sometimes, as a coach, you don't want to stand in a player's way. So, from a selfish point of view I'm hoping there isn't too much attention focused on Shane in South Africa.

"He's going to be an invaluable asset for us and we'd hate to lose him."

Smeltz admits anything could happen where he to hit the goal trail in South Africa.

"Anybody who understands football will realise that if you are on the world stage and you perform well then people take notice," he admitted.

"For now, I'm more than happy to be back on the Gold Coast, where I grew up, and I have no plans to move on.

Johnny Warren Medal winner Shane Smeltz may still head overseas before playing a game for Gold Coast United

"But football is an unpredictable livelihood, and, like I said, many things can happen when you least expect it."

Smeltz is looking forward, though, to competing with stellar North Queensland Fury import Robbie Fowler for top billing in the goalscoring stakes next season.

"I think his mere presence will inspire every striker to lift his game. He's somebody I watched growing up and the fact he's here helps strengthen the league at a time when a lot of players are leaving for Asia or Europe.

"If he does well, it will send out a very positive message and perhaps attract other players of a similar calibre.

"He's still at an age where he can be very effective, he was in the English Premier League a few months ago and having him here will push us all to so better."

Smeltz, the A-League's Golden Boot winner and 2007 Oceania Player of the Year, jets to Thailand on March 24 for Confederations Cup warm-up games against the nation managed by Englishman Peter Reid on March 28 and Thailand 'A' on April 1.

Smeltz, who has scored 17 goals for New Zealand, is likely to miss United's pre-season Asian tour, which takes to the air in mid-June en-route for New Caledonia, Hong Kong and China.

He is not expected back in Australia before June 21 at the earliest, and that's assuming, not without some credence, that the unheralded Kiwis fail to progress beyond the group stage.

It doesn't end there for Smeltz with the All Whites due to face the fifth-placed Asian country for the final World Cup spot at South Africa 2010 in late November over two legs.

German-born Smeltz is also in the process of finally taking out Australian citizenship in a move that would allow United to sign an extra visa player - and open the door to Asia for him should a big money offer arrive from Japan, Korea or China at some stage under new eligibility rules.

Former Adelaide United star Nathan Burns is enjoying his time at AEK Athens

BURNS FINDING FEET IN GREECE

Former Adelaide United star Nathan Burns is experiencing a rebirth at Greek Super League club AEK Athens after a slow and frustrating start to his football career in Europe.

The 20 year-old attacking midfielder has appeared off the bench in the Athenian club's past three matches and AEK's Serbian coach Dusan Bajevic is reportedly pleased with the his progress.

Bajevic, one of the most successful coaches in Greek football history, returned to the club for a third stint in charge of the 'Enosi' in November 2008 and the tough disciplinarian has demanded the players shape up or leave.

As a result, AEK are now in fourth position in the Greek Super League and pushing front runners Panathinaikos and PAOK Salonika for one of Greece's two UEFA Champions League spots.

According to Greek website Ethnosport.gr, the AEK boss singled out Burns, encouraging him to work harder for his place in the team.

"I don't know if you have the courage to try, but I believe if you give your all you will be rewarded," Bajevic said. "You will be given an opportunity to show your worth."

Burns, dubbed 'Kangaroo' by the Greek media, has done well to withstand the turmoil in his first few months at the Greek giants. In his short time there, the president that signed him resigned - the coach following soon after.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2009/10

GROUP A

PAKHTAKOR .....1 AL HILAL 1
SABA BATTERY .....0 AL AHLI 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
PAKHTAKOR (UZB)	2	1	1	0	3	2	1	4
AL HILAL (KSA)	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	2
SABA BATTERY (IRN)	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2
AL AHLI (UAE)	2	0	1	1	1	2	-1	1

NEXT FIXTURES
7 APRIL 2009
AL HILAL (KSA) - AL AHLI (UAE)
SABA BATTERY (IRN) - PAKHTAKOR (UZB)

GROUP B

AL SHABAB .....0 PIROOZI ATHLETIC 0
SHARJAH .....0 AL GHARAFA 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
AL SHABAB (KSA)	2	1	1	0	3	1	2	4
PIROOZI ATHLETIC (IRN)	2	1	1	0	3	1	2	4
AL GHARAFA (QAT)	2	1	0	1	3	3	0	3
SHARJAH (UAE)	2	0	0	2	1	5	-4	0

NEXT FIXTURES
8 APRIL 2009
PIROOZI ATHLETIC (IRN) - AL GHARAFA (QAT)
SHARJAH (UAE) - AL SHABAB (KSA)

GROUP C

ESTEGHLAL .....1 AL JAZIRA 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
AL ITTIHAD (KSA)	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	3
UMM-SALAL (QAT)	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
AL JAZIRA (UAE)	2	0	1	1	1	2	-1	1
ESTEGHLAL (IRN)	2	0	1	1	2	3	-1	1

NEXT FIXTURES
7 APRIL 2009
AL JAZIRA (UAE) - AL ITTIHAD (KSA)
UMM-SALAL (QAT) - ESTEGHLAL (IRN)

GROUP D

AL SHABAB AL ARABI .2 BUNYODKOR 0
ETTIFAQ .....2 FOOLAD SEPAHAN ...1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
FOOLAD SEPAHAN (IRN)	2	1	0	1	3	2	1	3
AL ARABI (UAE)	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
ETTIFAQ (KSA)	2	1	0	1	3	3	0	3
BUNYODKOR (UZB)	2	1	0	1	2	3	-1	3

NEXT FIXTURES
8 APRIL 2009
BUNYODKOR (UZB) - FOOLAD MOBAREKEH SEPAHAN (IRN)
ETTIFAQ (KSA) - AL SHABAB AL ARABI (UAE)

Jets claim historic Asian victory

Newcastle Jets 2
(Petrovski 15'/43')
Ulsan Hyundai Horang-i 0

The Newcastle Jets have claimed their first win in the AFC Champions League 2009, defeating their Korean counterparts Ulsan Hyundai Horang-i 2-0 in their match day two clash at Newcastle Stadium last week.

A well taken brace by new signing Sasho Petrovski ensured Newcastle secured their first three points of the prestigious competition, much to the delight of a vociferous home crowd of 7,314.

The Jets may have recorded an even larger victory had it not been for Ulsan keeper Kim Seung Gyu, who pulled off a number of classy saves in the Tigers' goal.

The Jets started the match positively and took the lead in the 15th minute when Ben Katarovski's cross was flicked on by Nikolai Topor-Stanley to Ljubo Milicevic, who prodded on again to Petrovski. With his left foot, Petrovski volleyed home powerfully from eight-yards and, despite Ulsan's cries for offside, referee Masoud Moradi allowed the goal to stand.

Five minutes later and Ulsan went close to equalising. A loose pass from Kantarovski found its way to Brazilian striker Luisinho whose strong strike from range went just inches wide.

The match settled until the 35th minute when Dutchman Donny de Groot went close to extending Newcastle's lead. A superb cross from Tarek Elrich found the powerfully built striker who would have scored if it wasn't for the heroics of Seung Gyu.

Ljubo Milicevic of the Jets and Luisinho of Ulsan Hyundai clash during the AFC Champions League

The Jets did double their lead a few minutes before halftime however, as Petrovski netted his second of the night in clinical fashion. Meeting Italian Fabio Vignaroli's well-flighted free kick, Petrovski nodded a text-book header over Seung Gyu to give Newcastle the perfect cushion heading into the break.

Both teams came out after halftime showing enterprise, however lacking a killer touch. Vignaroli was outstanding for the Jets, wreaking havoc amongst the Ulsan defence with his silky skills whilst midfielder You Hohun was desperately unlucky not to pull one back for the Korean visitors when his 68th minute free kick whisked past Ante Covic's left post.

Coach Gary van Egmond decided to give Petrovski a well earned rest in the 71st minute, bringing on the returning Marko Jesic for the remaining 20 minutes of play.

Early showers were also given to fellow new boys Vignaroli and de Groot, with van Egmond deploying youngsters Brodie Mooy and Kaz Patafta late on.

The last chance of the night fell to Ulsan defender Lim Jong Eun, whose unorthodox shot was well claimed by Covic.

Van Egmond was pleased with the crucial three points at home, but believes his side will only get better as the AFC Champions League 2009 rolls on.

"It was very pleasing, obviously here in our home town and in front of our supporters, in lieu of the fact that we lost our first game it was imperative for us to win and the boys duly did so."

"Overall the fluency and the combinations between the players is getting better and better with the more training sessions they have and obviously the games that they have together. I thought at times the front third in changing the point of the attack was quite good especially in the first half."

"Second half, we got to a two-nil lead and we tried to protect it a little bit, probably then we've got to start to go a little bit higher and push out and play the game a little bit higher up the pitch," van Egmond said.

Match Details:

Newcastle Jets: 1 Ante COVIC (GK), 2 Tarek ELRICH, 3 Adam D'APUZZO, 4 Nikolai TOPOR-STANLEY, 5 Ljubo MILICEVIC, 6 Ben KANTAROVSKI, 8 Matt THOMPSON, 9 Sasho PETROVSKI (71' Marko JESIC), 10 Donny DE GROOT (87' Kaz PATAFTA), 17 Fabio VIGNAROLI (81' Brodie MOOY), 25 Adam GRIFFITHS

Unused substitutes: 12 Jobe WHEELHOUSE, 14 Angelo COSTANZO, 20 Ben KENNEDY (GK), 15 Nikolas TSATTALIOS

Yellow Cards: Adam Griffiths 53'
Red Cards: Nil

Ulsan Hyundai: 2 Oh CHANGSIK, 3 Kim YONGTAE, 10 Fernandes LUIS CARLOS, 14 You HOJUN, 15 Kim YOUNGSAM, 21 Kim SEUNG GYU (GK), 23 Kim DONGKYU, 24 Kim SHINWOOK, 25 Park JUN TAE, 28 Kim MINOH (37 Choi JIN SOO 67'), 36 Lim JONGEUN

Unused substitutes: 8 Lee DONGKEUN, 20 Lee SANGDON, 29 Lee YONG JOON, 31 Choi MOOLIM, 35 Kim DONG MIN

Yellow Cards: Nil
Red Cards: Nil
Crowd: 7,314
Referee: Masoud Moradi

Nagoya and Beijing share honours after goalless deadlock

Beijing Guoan picked up a vital point away from home as they held Nagoya Grampus to a scoreless draw at Mizuho Track and Field Stadium on Tuesday evening in Group E of the AFC Champions League.

Both clubs had notched up victories in their opening game last week – against Newcastle Jets and Ulsan Hyundai respectively – and the result means the pair are deadlocked at the top of the group standings after two games.

Nagoya boss Dragan Stojkovic made several changes to his starting line-up, bringing in midfielders Keita Sugimoto and Kei Yamaguchi in place of Brazilian Magnum and Naoshi Nakamura.

However, it was Brazilian Davi who conjured up the first opportunity of the game with just 10 minutes on the clock, but the striker headed Shohei Abe's cross over the bar.

Australian brothers Ryan and Joel Griffiths were to the fore for Beijing in the early exchanges but the Nagoya defence did well to keep the Chinese Super League side at bay.

With the hosts on the back foot, it took until the 27th minute before Grampus fashioned another goal scoring opportunity, when Yoshimizu Ogawa met a cross from Davi in the box but his effort was not good enough to break the deadlock.

Eight minutes later, Keiji Tamada fed a pass to Keiji Yoshimura but his effort, like Ogawa's, was wide of the target.

Magnum made an appearance from the substitutes' bench for Nagoya after the restart and his influence was soon felt by the home side as Nagoya took control.

But they were still unable to find a way past Beijing goalkeeper Yang Zhi, who did well to deny Davi midway through the half after the Brazilian tried his luck from 25 yards.

With nine minutes remaining, Hwang Bowen caused concern in the Nagoya defence when he fired off his goal bound attempt, but Seigo Narazaki was equal to the task.

And just six minutes later Beijing almost took all three points back to Beijing when Guo Hui beat Narazaki with his effort, only to see the ball come back off the post.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Mariners show character in Tianjin draw

Central Coast Mariners 2
(Caceres 48', Simon 61')

Tianjin Teda 2
(Eber Luis 37', Wu Weian 66')

The Central Coast Mariners' AFC Champions League campaign continued in a positive fashion in China's east this evening, with the visiting Mariners earning a precious Group H point following their 2-2 draw with Tianjin Teda.

Each side held a one-goal advantage throughout the course of a throbbing ninety minute spectacle where Adrian Caceres and Matt Simon became the Mariners' historic first ever goal scorers on the continent in reply to headed goals from Eber Luis and Wu Weian.

Dominant in terms of possession and chances, the Mariners were denied all three points by a pair of Tianjin corners that found their targets, but will return to the Central Coast contented with a performance that proved the Mariners' ability to compete on the biggest stage in Asia.

The Mariners have now emerged undefeated from two tough encounters against the elite club sides of the Korea Republic and China, with this result particularly inspiring in light of the amazing day-long journey that the yellow and navy were forced to endure from their hometown to Tianjin.

"Tonight, the game was played in very good spirits by both teams and I'm very proud of how our team performed over the ninety minutes," said Mariners Football Manager Lawrie McKinna after the match.

"I felt as though Tianjin had scored against the run of play in the first half and I felt as through we had weathered the storm and that we had them on the back foot.

"We deserved to go 2-1 up, but it was disappointing for us to concede two goals from two corners."

McKinna kept faith with the starting eleven that were so diligent against Pohang Steelers a week ago – the first time a Mariners starting side had been retained since Round 12 of the Hyundai A-League 2008/09 season.

Tianjin's starting side underlined their desire for a positive outcome with all four of their permitted foreign players earning starts, including Australian Olympian Mark Bridge and iconic Italian midfield talent Damiano Tommasi.

The quality of the hosts was evident in the fact that only French defender Jean-Philippe Caillet and Brazilian marksman Eber Luis had yet to be capped by their country at senior international level, with all of Tianjin's local contingent having worn the colours of their country at some stage of their careers.

Up until Tianjin's opener, the Mariners more than matched their more fancied opponents and were perhaps surprised to enjoy such an overwhelming share of possession.

Without creating a plethora of chances, the visitors front pairing of Nik Mrdja and Simon certainly loomed most likely to find the back of the net, with the collective quality of Bridge and Eber Luis largely negated by the Mariners backline.

However, as has become an unfortunate habit of the Mariners' recent history, Tianjin seized upon a rare opportunity from a set piece – Eber Luis powering home a corner from close range to hand the home side the lead shortly after the half hour mark.

The Mariners could so easily have conceded defeat given their recent run of outs, particularly considering the vociferous partisan atmosphere inside the Tianjin Teda Stadium.

In accordance with the Mariners spirit of old, however, the underdogs duly responded with two goals in the opening quarter of the second stanza to take an unlikely but richly deserved lead.

First, substitute Caceres deflected a Shane Huke shot past Tianjin goalkeeper Yang Jun only minutes after replacing Pedj Bojic at the break.

Caceres' strike, his third in Mariners colours but, most significantly, the first ever by a Mariners player in Asia's most prestigious club competition, ignited a Mariners charge that was always a threat merely lay dormant by a lack of confidence in the final third.

Fifteen minutes later, such confidence rose to a new level when Simon slotted his first since January with the calmness and collectiveness Mariners members and supporters have come to expect from their standout season four performer.

Simon, having received a ball from midfield, weaved past the Tianjin defence and confidently struck a low shot that instated the visiting team to a position that they had unquestionably earned

Reinvigorated and recharged, the Mariners immediately set about extending their advantage and showcased some vintage football before again conceding from a corner; this time it was Wu Weian nodding home from the near post on 66 minutes.

Through Simon and substitute Dylan Macallister – fit again after missing last Wednesday's clash due to illness – the Mariners always looked capable of snatching a winner but would settle for a share of the spoils and an ultimately positive result against considerable odds.

With rivals Kawasaki Frontale and Pohang Steelers drawing 1-1 in tonight's other Group H fixture, the Mariners maintain their second placing ahead of next month's blockbuster series against the aforementioned J.League heavyweights at home and away.

Lamentably, the Mariners will be without goal scorer Simon and defensive lynchpin Bojic, with both receiving their second yellow cards of the campaign in the first half and subsequently triggering respective one-match suspensions.

Conversely, the confidence gained by the yellow and navy after their best showing in months will mean that the Mariners side that takes on the Group H and perhaps AFC Champions League 2009 favourites will be one that is capable of achieving the optimum result.

"Overall, I said before the game that if we were to get a draw that it would be a good result for us, but our players are very disappointed that we didn't get three points," said McKinna.

Match Details

Central Coast Mariners: 20. Danny Vukovic (gk), 3. Shane Huke, 4. Pedj Bojic (10. Adrian Caceres 46'), 5. Bradley Porter, 7. John Hutchinson, 8. Dean Heffernan, 9. Nik Mrdja (11. Dylan Macallister 65'), 16. Nigel Boogaard, 17. Matthew Osman, 18. Alex Wilkinson, 19. Matt Simon.

Unused Subs 13. Paul O'Grady, 15. Andrew Clark, 21. Ahmad Elrich, 23. Adam Kwasnik, 30. Andrew Redmayne (gk)

Yellow Cards: Simon 6', Boogaard 30', Bojic 40'

Red Cards: None

Tianjin Teda: 1. Yang Jun (gk), 5. Wang Xiao, 6. Tan Wangsong, 8. Hao Junmin, 9. Wu Weian, 13. Wang Xinxin (21. Han Yanming 80'), 23. Jean-Philippe Caillet, 24. Mark Bridge (20. Mao Biao 59'), 26. Cao Yang, 28. Eber Luis (10. Zhang Shuo 89'), 30. Damiano Tommasi

Unused Subs 2. He Yang, 3. Bai Yi, 7. Chi Rongliang, 22. Zhao Yanming (gk)

Yellow Cards Tan Wangsong 41', Cao Yang 84'

Red Cards None

Referee: Malik Abdul Bashir (Singapore)

Crowd: 27,005

Terada steals point for Kawasaki

Pohang Steelers were left searching for their first win of the 2009 AFC Champions League as they were held to a 1-1 draw by Kawasaki Frontale at Pohang Steelyard on Wednesday.

The Koreans secured a point with a goalless draw at Central Coast Mariners in their opening game of Group H last week and were denied a win this time as Kim Jae-sung's 10th minute opener was cancelled out by Shuhei Terada 12 minutes later.

Pohang had plenty of possession throughout the game and created numerous chances but their profligacy in the final third proved their downfall.

Their cause was also not helped by the fine form of Kawasaki goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima as when Pohang did manage an effort on target, the Japanese shotstopper was found to be in fine form.

The point means Kawasaki climb to the top of their group with four points while Pohang have two points from two games.

Both teams had chances to open the scoring early in the game but it was the hosts who drew first blood in the 10th minute.

Macedonian striker Stevo Ristic fed a pass for Kim that put the midfielder through on goal and he slotted beyond Kawashima.

But Kawasaki responded well and were level 12 minutes later when Pohang goalkeeper Shin Hwa-yong could only push a Juninho shot behind for a corner, which Victor Jr swung in and was headed into the back of the net by Terada.

Pohang had the better of the chances to equalise after that with man-of-the-match Denilson proving a particular thorn in Kawasaki's side.

But the Japanese had the chance to snatch all three points seven minutes before time when Ristic was sent through one-on-one with Shin but his weak shot was comfortably saved by the goalkeeper.

Kawasaki sat back after that miss, seemingly satisfied with a point while Pohang pressed for a later winner but repeatedly wasted promising chances in the closing stages.

Pohang will continue their search for three points at home to Tianjin Teda on April 8 while Kawasaki travel to Australia to tackle Central Coast Mariners.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2009/10

GROUP E

NEWCASTLE JETS .....2 ULSAN HYUNDAI 0
NAGOYA GRAMPUS ....0 BEIJING GUOAN 0

	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-	Pts
BEIJING GUOAN (CHN)	2	1	1	0	2	0	2	4
NAGOYA GRAMPUS (JPN)	2	1	1	0	3	1	2	4
NEWCASTLE JETS (AUS)	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
ULSAN HYUNDAI (KOR)	2	0	0	2	1	5	-4	0

NEXT FIXTURES:
7 APRIL 2009
ULSAN HYUNDAI (KOR) - BEIJING GUOAN (CHN)
NAGOYA GRAMPUS (JPN) - NEWCASTLE JETS (AUS)

GROUP F

FC SEOUL .....2 GAMBA OSAKA 4
SHANDONG LUNENG FC5 SRIWIJAYA 0

	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-	Pts
GAMBA OSAKA (JPN)	2	2	0	0	7	2	5	6
SHANDONG FC (CHN)	2	1	0	1	5	3	2	3
FC SEOUL (KOR)	2	1	0	1	6	6	0	3
SRIWIJAYA(IDN)	2	0	0	2	2	9	-7	0

NEXT FIXTURES:
8 APRIL 2009
GAMBA OSAKA (JPN) - SRIWIJAYA (IDN)
SHANDONG LUNENG FC (CHN) - FC SEOUL (KOR)

GROUP G

KASHIMA ANTLERS ....2 SHANGHAI SHENHUA ...0
SINGAPORE AF FC .....0 SUWON BLUEWINGS ...2

	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-	Pts
SUWON (KOR)	2	2	0	0	6	1	5	6
SHANGHAI (CHN)	2	1	0	1	4	3	1	3
KASHIMA (JPN)	2	1	0	1	3	4	-1	3
SINGAPORE AF FC (SIN)	2	0	0	2	1	6	-5	0

NEXT FIXTURES:
7 APRIL 2009
SHANGHAI SHENHUA (CHN) - SUWON SAMSUNG BLUEWINGS (KOR)
SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES FC (SIN) - KASHIMA ANTLERS (JPN)

GROUP H

TIANJIN TEDA .....2 C.C. MARINERS 2
POHANG STEELERS ...1 KAWASAKI FRONTALE ..1

	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-	Pts
KAWASAKI (JPN)	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	4
C.C. MARINERS (AUS)	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	2
POHANG (KOR)	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2
TIANJIN TEDA (CHN)	2	0	1	1	2	3	-1	1

NEXT FIXTURES:
8 APRIL 2009
CENTRAL COAST MARINERS (AUS) - KAWASAKI FRONTALE (JPN)
POHANG STEELERS (KOR) - TIANJIN TEDA (CHN)

ASIA

ASIAN WORLD CUP QUALIFYING

GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
AUSTRALIA	6	3	1	2	7	3	4	10
QATAR	6	3	1	2	5	6	-1	10
IRAQ	6	2	1	3	4	6	-2	7
CHINA P.R.	6	1	3	2	3	4	-1	6

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-	Pts
JAPAN	6	4	1	1	12	3	9	13
BAHRAIN	6	3	2	1	7	5	2	11
OMAN	6	2	2	2	5	7	-2	8
THAILAND	6	0	1	5	5	14	-9	1

GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
KOREA REPUBLIC	6	3	3	0	10	3	7	12
DPR KOREA	6	3	3	0	4	0	4	12
JORDAN	6	2	1	3	6	6	0	7
TURKMENISTAN	6	0	1	4	1	12	-11	1

GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
UZBEKISTAN	6	5	0	1	15	7	8	15
SAUDI ARABIA	6	5	0	1	14	5	9	15
SINGAPORE	6	2	0	4	7	13	-8	6
LEBANON	6	0	0	5	2	12	-10	0

GROUP 5

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-	Pts
I.R. IRAN	6	3	3	0	5	2	3	12
UAE	6	2	2	2	7	7	0	8
SYRIA	6	2	2	2	7	8	-1	8
KUWAIT	6	1	1	4	8	12	-4	4

FINAL ROUND QUALIFYING

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-	Pts
AUSTRALIA	4	3	1	0	6	0	6	10
JAPAN	4	2	2	0	7	3	4	8
BAHRAIN	4	1	1	2	4	5	-1	4
QATAR	4	1	1	2	4	8	-4	4
UZBEKISTAN	4	0	1	3	1	6	-5	1

NEXT FIXTURES
28 MARCH 2009
JAPAN - BAHRAIN
UZBEKISTAN - QATAR

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-	Pts
KOREA REPUBLIC	4	2	2	0	8	3	5	8
DPR KOREA	4	2	1	1	5	4	1	7
I.R. IRAN	4	1	3	0	5	4	1	6
SAUDI ARABIA	4	1	1	2	3	5	-2	4
UAE	4	0	1	3	4	9	-5	1

NEXT FIXTURES
28 MARCH 2009
I.R. IRAN - SAUDI ARABIA
DPR KOREA - UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Medhi Mahdavikia - Iran/Saudi WC Qualifier Is Life Or Death For Both

With the top two from each Asian qualifying group automatically progressing to the 2010 World Cup, Saudi Arabia are in more trouble at the halfway stage with just four points from four games.

Iran are in third with six. South Korea lead with eight, while North Korea have a point less.

Medhi Mahdavikia, who has been in and out of the Eintracht Frankfurt starting eleven all season, has been recalled to Team Melli by coach Ali Daei and is looking forward to the clash.

"I have always said that advancing to the World Cup requires major commitment and is a huge effort. This is a life or death match for both of us and we need a win," the 2002 Asian Player of the Year told Goal.com.

"I have always proved that I work my hardest for the national team and I still have much to offer at that level," he added.

Mahdavikia claimed that he hadn't been glued to the screen when Iran were in action without him.

"I have not had a chance to watch the games but I have heard that the goalkeeper Rahmati has been the star of Iran's recent matches," he said.

The 31-year-old was less forthcoming about how he was recalled while 2006 World Cup team-mate Ali Karimi was not – despite a big campaign in the Tehran media.

"Both Karimi and I have been productive for the national team and I hope we could repeat the good memories of the past for our nation.

"As for getting selected, it is the head coach's decision and I respect that. Your question should be addressed to him."

Japan Name Squad For Bahrain World Cup Qualifier

The new face in the Japan roster to face Bahrain on March 28 is Albirex Niigata's striker Kisho Yano.

Coach Takeshi Okada has also summoned Shunsuke Nakamura of Celtic, Daisuke Matsui, who plays for St-Etienne, and Wolfsburg's Makoto Hasebe.

"All matches are important; but this is the one that we have to fight it out for a win," Okada told reporters.

"We need to take risks to score goals. I've picked the players who have good game fitness and can give that kind of performance.

"Kisho can make good challenges up front."

Japan are second in Group Two with eight points from four games, two points behind Australia.

Bahrain are in third with four points.

Japan squad: Seigo Narazaki (Nagoya Grampus), Ryota Tsuzuki (Urawa Reds), Eiji Kawashima (Kawasaki Frontale); Shuhei Terada (Kawasaki Frontale), Yuji Nakazawa (Yokohama F. Marinos), Marcus Tulio Tanaka (Urawa Reds), Yuichi Komano (Jubilo Iwata), Yuki Abe (Urawa Reds), Yuto Nagatomo (FC Tokyo), Atsuto Uchida (Kashima Antlers); Shunsuke Nakamura (Celtic), Hideo Hashimoto (Gamba Osaka), Kengo Nakamura (Kawasaki Frontale), Daisuke Matsui (St. Etienne), Yasuyki Konno (FC Tokyo), Makoto Hasebe (VfL Wolfsburg), Mu Kanazaki (Oita Trinita), Shinji Kagawa (Cerezo Osaka); Keiji Tamada (Nagoya Grampus), Yoshito Okubo (VfL Wolfsburg), Tatsuya Tanaka (Urawa Reds), Kisho Yano (Albirex Niigata), Shinji Okazaki (Shimizu S-Pulse).

Indonesia: Time To Believe In 2022 World Cup Bid

As Indonesia has officially bid for the 2022 World Cup, the secretary general of the nation's FA, known as PSSI, Nugraha Besoes admitted that there was a lot of work to be done.

"We've sent all the documents that are required by FIFA, and now we'll wait for FIFA's response to our intention," Nugraha said according to the Jakarta Globe.

"This will be a long journey. We have to start the hard work and prove to the world we have the capabilities to stage the greatest event on earth."

Australia, Qatar, Japan and South Korea are also in the race for the 2018 and/or 2022 World cups.

More than their Asian rivals, there is a good deal of work to be done inproving stadiums and infrastructure in Indonesia.

The FA's plan is to renovate three stadiums and build ten new arenas. This could cost almost one billion US dollars.

If the government lends a hand then Nugraha is optimistic that something could happen.

"I don't know how big our chance is," Nugraha said.

"What we need to do now is roll up our sleeves and believe in our dreams."

Coachless Senegal Tackle Oman And Iran

The Teranga Lions of Senegal are billed to take on Oman on March 28 and four days later play Iran in Teheran.

The 2002 World Cup quarter-finalists are without a coach since they failed to advance to the final qualifying phase of the 2010 World Cup.

Senegal announced recently that they cannot afford to hire a foreign coach, and would instead name a local coach to head the national team.

The federation's technical director, Amsatou Fall, is to serve as caretaker coach for the matches against Oman and Iran.

The squad will also include several home-based players who reached the semi-finals of the inaugural Championship of African Nations (CHAN) in the Ivory Coast earlier this month.

ASIAN CUP QUALIFYING 2011

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
BAHRAIN	2	2	0	0	4	1	3	6
JAPAN	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
YEMEN	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
HONG KONG	2	0	0	2	1	4	-3	0

NEXT FIXTURES
14 NOVEMBER 2009
JAPAN - HONG KONG
YEMEN – BAHRAIN

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
OMAN	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	4
KUWAIT	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	3
INDONESIA	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
AUSTRALIA	2	0	1	1	0	1	-1	1

NEXT FIXTURES
14 NOVEMBER 2009
AUSTRALIA - OMAN
KUWAIT – INDONESIA

GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
UAE	2	1	0	1	5	1	4	3
UZBEKISTAN	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
MALAYSIA	1	0	0	1	0	5	-5	0

NEXT FIXTURES
14 NOV 2009
UZBEKISTAN - MALAYSIA
MALAYSIA – UZBEKISTAN

GROUP D

	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-	Pts
SYRIA	2	2	0	0	5	2	3	6
CHINA P.R.	2	1	0	1	8	4	4	3
VIETNAM	2	1	0	1	4	7	-3	3
LEBANON	2	0	0	2	1	5	-4	0

NEXT FIXTURES
14 NOV 2009
VIETNAM - SYRIA
LEBANON - CHINA P.R.

GROUP E

	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-	Pts
I.R. IRAN	2	1	1	0	6	0	6	4
SINGAPORE	2	1	0	1	2	7	-5	3
THAILAND	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
JORDAN	2	0	1	1	1	2	-1	1

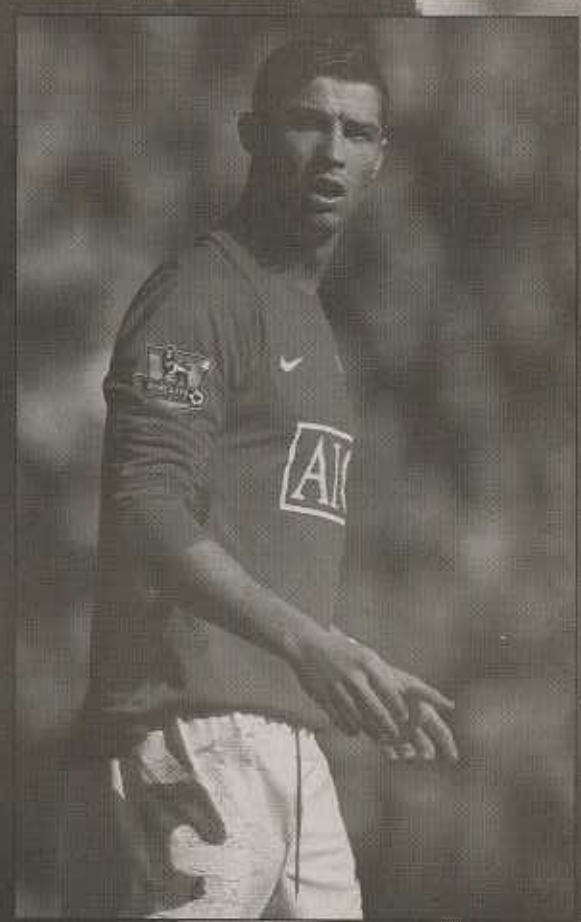
NEXT FIXTURES:
14 NOV 2009
I.R. IRAN - JORDAN
SINGAPORE - THAILAND

ENGLAND

BIG GUNS CRASH IN EPL

Ronaldo wants to stay at Utd

Chelsea want the Alves factor



- ◆Moyes hails Fellaini's impact at Everton
- ◆Kolo Toure still to commit to Arsenal
- ◆Full Wrap of the English Premier League and FA Cup

ENGLAND

United drop two in two

Fulham 2
Manchester United 0

Fulham smashed the Barclays Premier League title race wide open with a sensational 2-0 victory against nine-man Manchester United at Craven Cottage.

Danny Murphy put Fulham ahead in the 17th minute when he converted from the penalty spot after Paul Scholes was sent off for handling a header from Bobby Zamora.

Substitute Zoltan Gera then completed a fabulous afternoon for the Cottagers when he hooked home a cross by Andrew Johnson three minutes from time.

United were then reduced to nine men when substitute Wayne Rooney was dismissed for a second bookable offence seconds later.

It was United's second successive defeat following their 4-1 home mauling by Liverpool last weekend and the first time the champions and league leaders had suffered back-to-back losses in the league since April 2005.

Fulham served notice of their intentions when Clint Dempsey fired just wide with an angled drive in the second minute.

Moments later though United almost stole the lead when Dimitar Berbatov headed just over from a cross by Patrice Evra.

Zamora was allowed to run on freely after collecting the ball midway in the United half. Unfortunately for the Fulham striker he could not take advantage of his freedom and sent a 20-yard drive beyond Edwin van der Sar's right-hand post.

It was all Fulham with United looking decidedly shaky. Their pressure paid off in dramatic fashion in the 17th minute when Scholes was sent off for handball.

The corner from Simon Davies was headed goalwards by Brede Hangeland and after Zamora's first flick-on was saved by Van der Sar, his second attempt was kept out by the hands of Scholes.

Captain Murphy stepped up to send Van der Sar the wrong way from the spot to give Fulham the lead.

United were clearly having a confidence crisis and the goal was just reward for Fulham's bullish opening.

The Cottagers were humbled 4-0 in the FA Cup at Craven Cottage by United earlier in the month but Sir Alex Ferguson's side now faced a struggle to get back into the game after being reduced to 10 men.

Fulham continued to dominate and only a brilliant save from Van der Sar prevented Zamora from making it two in the 21st minute.

Fulham wasted two more chances to go further ahead with Van der Sar saving brilliantly from Zamora again in the 27th minute and then two minutes later Dempsey sent a right-foot drive flashing wide from 20 yards.

In the 32nd minute a cross from Dempsey was met by the head of Dickson Etuhu but the Fulham midfielder's header was collected safely by Van der Sar.

Moments later the Dutchman had to be alert once more as he dived to his right to catch a ferocious long-range drive from Zamora.

It was an uncharacteristic performance from United with Ryan Giggs guilty of some dreadful passing.

But Fulham had stung the league leaders with an all-action display to outplay their opponents from the start.

United full-back Evra was booked in first-half stoppage time for diving as Fulham were given a standing ovation on the whistle.

Ferguson decided Rooney would provide more firepower in attack as he replaced the ineffective Berbatov for the second half.

In the 52nd minute a cross from Darren Fletcher saw Cristiano Ronaldo climb high to send a header just over the Fulham crossbar.

Ronaldo was becoming more and more frustrated at Phil Dowd's reluctance to award a free-kick every time the Portugal international was tackled.

The United winger was so incensed that he produced a lunge at Murphy which was punished by a yellow card.

Ronaldo was saved by the fact his reckless challenge did not connect with Murphy, but his antics found little favour with the home crowd who booed him at every opportunity.

But United were beginning to get back into the game and Fletcher brought a save from Mark Schwarzer in the 59th minute when he let loose with a low drive from 20 yards.

Fulham had Schwarzer to thank again in the 61st minute when he saved superbly to keep out a powerful header from Ronaldo.

Has anyone seen Sir Alex Ferguson this upset before?

In the 64th minute, the Australian produced an incredible double save at point-blank range to deny Park Ji-Sung and Rooney and then dived full length to keep out a Ronaldo drive.

Fulham were now reeling for the first time in the game and Murphy was forced off through injury to be replaced by Olivier Dacourt in the 67th minute.

United responded a minute later by removing John O'Shea and replacing him with Carlos Tevez.

But Fulham made the game safe three minutes from time when substitute Gera struck their second from Johnson's assist and Rooney saw red for a second bookable offence as the frustration of defeat proved too much to bear.

Spurs hand Hiddink maiden defeat

Tottenham Hotspur 1
Chelsea 0

Chelsea missed a golden opportunity to cut the gap at the top of the Barclays Premier League as Luka Modric's solitary strike helped Tottenham inflict Guus Hiddink's first defeat since arriving in England.

A suspect vehicle near White Hart Lane delayed kick-off, meaning the visitors kicked off knowing leaders Manchester United were struggling at Fulham, but they failed to take advantage.

Victory would have taken them within a point of United but Hiddink's men were frustrated by a Tottenham side who have been transformed since Harry Redknapp's arrival five months ago, with Modric striking the winner just after the interval.

Spurs goalkeeper Heurelho Gomes also played a huge part in the victory, saving from John Terry late on when the away fans thought they were on level terms. Alex also hit the crossbar in stoppage time as Spurs held on.

Redknapp's men were relegation candidates when he took over in October but they are unbeaten in six league games and could be in with a shout for Europe.

On a personal level, Redknapp had not beaten Chelsea in a league game since 1999. More importantly, he feels his side could challenge the traditional top four in their next campaign.

The visitors, however, have still not recorded a win over one of their London rivals this season and their task was not made easier by Ricardo Carvalho picking up an ankle injury this week, meaning Alex deputised at centre-back.

Deco's hamstring problem meant Juliano Belletti came in on the right side of a midfield squeezed for space, especially when Spurs skipper Robbie Keane dropped back to help his team-mates.

Hiddink's men were predictably limited to long shots and Michael Essien, back from a serious injury, forced Gomes into a save which he gathered at the second attempt early on.

At the other end, Jermaine Jenas just cleared the angle of crossbar and near post with a fizzing drive.

The hosts got closer in the 18th minute after Alex failed to deal with a long punt forward, with Petr Cech required to beat away Keane's powerful volley.

Cech stopped Keane again after Vedran Corluka had raced down the right and pulled the ball back, although this effort was much closer to the Chelsea goalkeeper.

The visitors were being denied space on the ball, with Nicolas Anelka often dropping into midfield to get involved. That was how the France striker started the move that ended with the ball breaking to him on the edge of the area and Gomes saving at the near post.

Encouraged by Chelsea's limited chances, Spurs attempted to break forward. Cech claimed the ball when Keane cut in and had a shot blocked by Alex and the Chelsea goalkeeper also plucked the ball from under his crossbar from Ledley King's looping header.

King clattered Didier Drogba with his thigh while winning a header and the Chelsea striker looked dazed while receiving treatment and heading down the tunnel, the visitors seeing out the first half with 10 men.

Drogba was fit to start the second half but Chelsea were behind within five minutes of the restart.

Aaron Lennon received the ball on the right, feigned to go down the flank but instead he crossed early, between Ashley Cole and Frank Lampard.

Keane could have struck but Modric took control of the situation, crisply finishing from the edge of the area into the bottom corner for his fourth goal of the season.

He almost repeated the trick when he got on the end of another Lennon cross, but this time his effort lacked power.

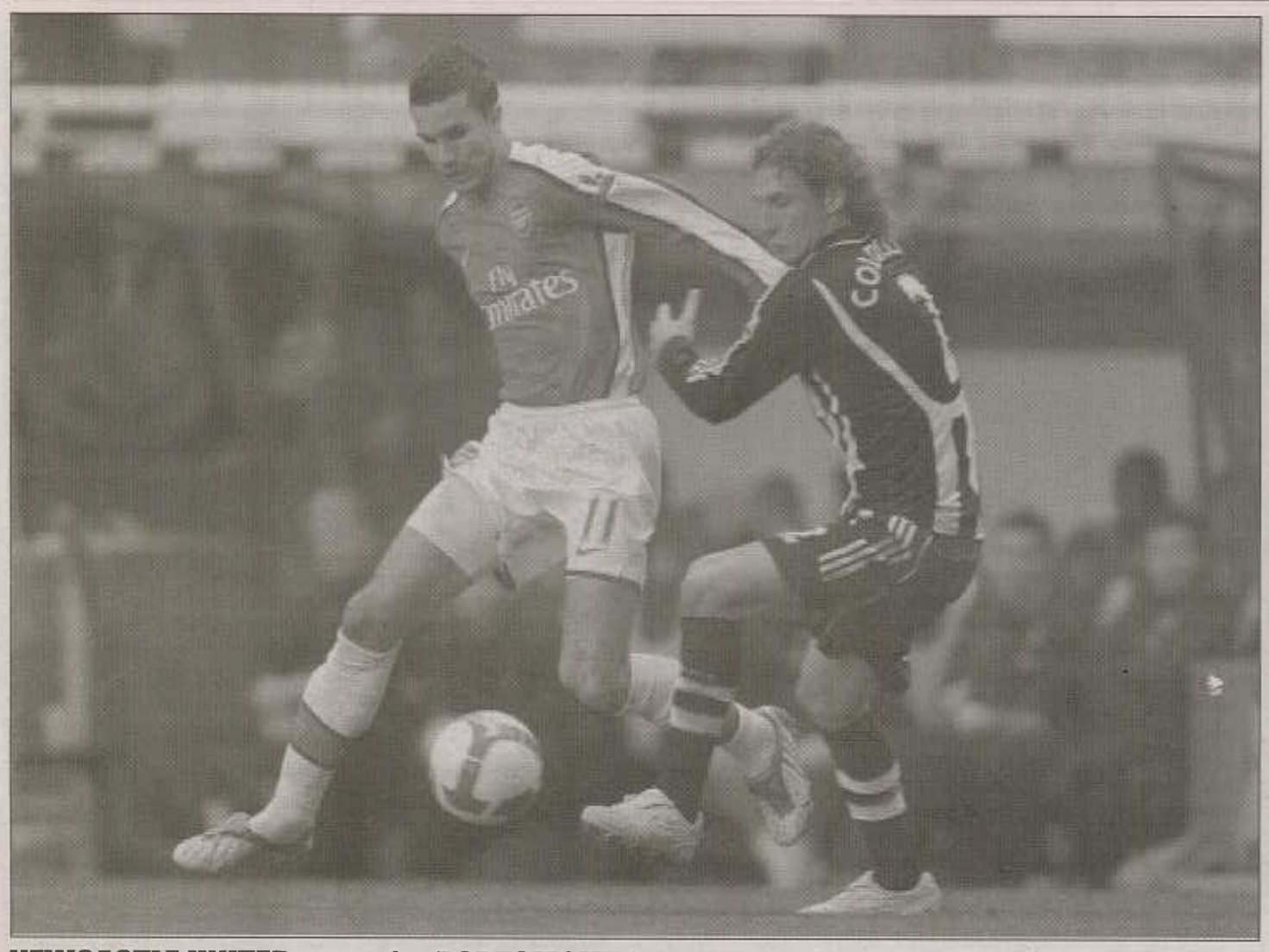
Hiddink's response was to bring on Ricardo Quaresma for Belletti, moments before Lampard struck the frame of the goal with a header at the far post.

Gomes saved from Drogba at the near post and from Quaresma's long-range effort as Chelsea searched for the equaliser.

Drogba sliced another shot wide, with Hiddink's next move to bring on Florent Malouda for Essien.

Terry forced Gomes into his stunning full-stretch save, then King's block on Anelka was equally important. Alex hit the bar deep in injury-time with a header from a corner but Spurs held on.

ENGLAND



NEWCASTLE UNITED 1
ARSENAL 3

Michael Owen could not prevent Newcastle from slipping deep into relegation trouble as Arsenal closed the gap on the Barclays Premier League's top three with a 3-1 victory.

The England striker, who started the game on the bench, arrived just in time to see the Gunners earn some breathing space at St James' Park, and there was little he or anyone else in a black and white shirt could do about it.

It might have been different had Obafemi Martins converted a 23rd-minute penalty - which Owen would have taken had he started - but Manuel Almunia kept out his spot-kick to provide the platform for a clinical second-half display.

Nicklas Bendtner opened the scoring with a 57th-minute header, but Martins levelled within seconds to give his side hope.

However, goals from Abou Diaby and Samir Nasri within a devastating three-minute period wrapped up a win which saw the Gunners close the gap to Manchester United, Chelsea and Liverpool, and at the same time, dump Newcastle into the mire.

PORTSMOUTH 2
EVERTON 1

Peter Crouch scored twice as Portsmouth came from behind to beat Everton 2-1 at Fratton Park and breathe new life into their battle for Premier League survival.

Leighton Baines had fired the visitors into an early lead with a well-taken free-kick.

However, Crouch powered in a header to draw Pompey level on 23 minutes, and struck again from close range late in the second half to secure a vital victory for the relegation battlers.

Everton had gone into the game defending a five-game unbeaten league run and were aiming to keep the pressure on Aston Villa while also seeking to close in again on fourth-placed Arsenal, who now occupy the coveted final Champions League spot.

STOKE CITY 1
MIDDLESBROUGH 0

Ryan Shawcross' 84th-minute header earned Stoke a 1-0 victory at home to Middlesbrough and provided a huge boost to their relegation battle.

The defender escaped his marker to deflect Rory Delap's long throw into the far corner of the net.

Stoke had carved out the best of few chances created and the result increases the pressure on next-bottom Boro, who have now failed to score in seven of their last nine league matches and have not won away from home since November 9.

Conversely the hosts have taken 28 points at the Britannia Stadium from their season's tally of 32 and their remaining four games at home which will probably decide their fate.

Next Fixtures:

Saturday, April 4

Blackburn Rovers
vs
Tottenham Hotspur

Bolton Wanderers
vs
Middlesbrough
Arsenal vs Manchester City
Hull City vs Portsmouth
Newcastle United vs Chelsea
West Bromwich Albion vs Stoke City
West Ham United vs Sunderland
Fulham vs Liverpool

Sunday, April 5

Everton vs Wigan Athletic
Manchester United vs Aston Villa

WBA 1
BOLTON WANDERERS 1

West Brom slipped nearer the relegation trapdoor despite an own goal from Danny Shittu denying their former boss Gary Megson a triumphant first return to the Hawthorns.

Matt Taylor's second half goal - his eighth of the season - looked to have earned Bolton a first away win in four months.

But with eight minutes remaining Shittu deflected a low Robert Koren drive past Jussi Jaaskelainen for the equaliser.

Megson was sent from the dug-out in injury time after exchanging words with referee Howard Webb following the substitution of Johan Elmander with Ebi Smolarek.

Albion goalkeeper Scott Carson made several important saves to keep his side in contention.

But a point will do little to help Albion's bid to avoid the drop.

BLACKBURN ROVERS 1
WEST HAM UNITED 1

Substitute Keith Andrews salvaged a 1-1 draw for relegation-threatened Blackburn at Ewood Park but Sam Allardyce's men will reflect on a missed opportunity to put more space between themselves and the drop zone.

Andrews lashed home a right-footed shot from a tight angle in the 51st minute to cancel out Mark Noble's first-half opener for West Ham and set up a grandstand finish by the home side.

But despite pinning the visitors back in their own half for long periods, chances went begging for Benni McCarthy, Jason Roberts and Morten Gamst Pedersen while El-Hadji Diouf had two efforts disallowed for offside.

But Rovers at least showed plenty of resolve to bounce back from their Emirates Stadium mauling by Arsenal and with striker Roque Santa Cruz soon due to return their prospects of survival still look bright.

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Manchester Utd	29	20	5	4	49	18	65
2 Chelsea	30	18	7	5	49	17	61
3 Liverpool	29	17	10	2	49	21	61
4 Arsenal	30	15	10	5	48	27	55
5 Aston Villa	29	15	7	7	43	31	52
6 Everton	30	13	9	8	40	31	48
7 West Ham Utd	30	11	8	11	35	35	41
8 Fulham	30	10	10	10	30	26	40
9 Tottenham Hotspur	30	10	8	12	36	34	38
10 Wigan Athletic	29	10	8	11	29	28	38
11 Manchester City	29	10	5	14	45	37	35
12 Bolton Wanderers	30	10	4	16	32	44	34
13 Hull City	29	8	9	12	35	51	33
14 Sunderland	29	8	8	13	29	38	32
15 Portsmouth	29	8	8	13	32	46	32
16 Stoke City	30	8	8	14	29	47	32
17 Blackburn Rovers	30	7	10	13	33	49	31
18 Newcastle Utd	30	6	11	13	36	49	29
19 Middlesbrough	30	6	9	15	21	42	27
20 WBA	30	6	6	18	26	55	24

ENGLISH CHAMPIONSHIP

Birmingham 1 Norwich City 1, Blackpool 1 Southampton 1, Charlton Athletic 0 Preston North End 0, Coventry City 1 Doncaster Rovers 0, Derby County 0 Barnsley 0, Ipswich Town 0 Watford 0, Nottingham Forest 0 Wolverhampton Wanderers 1, Plymouth Argyle 1 Burnley 2, Queens Park Rangers 2 Bristol City 1, Sheffield Wednesday 0 Swansea City 0, Crystal Palace 0 Reading 0.

	Pld	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Wolverhampton	40	23	8	9	71	47	77
2 Birmingham	40	20	12	8	47	33	72
3 Reading	39	19	11	9	65	35	68
4 Burnley	40	18	11	11	62	54	65
5 Sheffield United	38	17	12	9	55	37	63
6 Cardiff City	37	16	15	6	52	34	63
7 Preston North End	40	17	10	13	53	50	61
8 Swansea City	40	13	19	8	55	44	58
9 Bristol City	40	15	13	12	49	43	58
10 Ipswich Town	40	14	14	12	52	44	56
11 QPR	40	14	14	12	38	38	56
12 Crystal Palace	39	14	9	16	50	49	51
13 Sheffield Wed	40	13	12	15	44	53	51
14 Coventry City	38	13	11	14	42	46	50
15 Doncaster Rovers	40	14	7	19	33	47	49
16 Watford	39	13	8	18	57	62	47
17 Derby County	38	12	11	15	48	53	47
18 Blackpool	40	11	14	15	40	52	47
19 Barnsley	38	12	8	18	37	48	44
20 Norwich City	40	11	10	19	50	58	43
21 Plymouth Argyle	40	11	10	19	37	51	43
22 Nottingham Forest	40	10	11	19	41	60	41
23 Southampton	39	9	13	17	38	54	40
24 Charlton Athletic	39	6	11	22	41	65	29

ENGLISH LEAGUE 1

Bristol Rovers 0 Peterborough United 1, Crewe Alexandra 2 Leeds United 3, Hartlepool United 2 Millwall 3, Huddersfield Town 2 Cheltenham Town 2, Leicester City 1 Colchester United 1, Leyton Orient 0 Walsall 1, Northampton Town 4 Stockport County 0, Oldham Athletic 0 Tranmere Rovers 2, Scunthorpe United 2 Brighton 0, Southend United 3 Carlisle United 0, Swindon Town 3 Hereford United 0, Yeovil Town 0 Milton Keynes Dons 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Leicester City	39	23	13	3	71	32	82
2 Peterborough Utd	39	22	9	8	69	48	75
3 Millwall	38	21	7	10	53	42	70
4 Milton Keynes Dons	37	20	8	9	72	41	68
5 Leeds United	38	20	5	13	64	45	65
6 Scunthorpe United	38	19	7	12	66	52	64
7 Tranmere Rovers	39	18	8	13	54	43	62
8 Oldham Athletic	38	15	13	10	57	53	58
9 Southend United	39	17	7	15	48	52	58
10 Stockport County	39	15	11	13	54	47	56
11 Colchester United	38	15	9	14	52	50	54
12 Walsall	39	15	9	15	53	55	54
13 Bristol Rovers	37	13	12	12	64	48	51
14 Huddersfield Town	38	13	12	13	50	57	51
15 Hartlepool United	39	11	10	18	54	64	43
16 Carlisle United	38	11	9	18	47	60	42
17 Leyton Orient	38	11	9	18	34	47	42
18 Crewe Alexandra	38	12	6	20	52	69	42
19 Northampton Town	36	10	11	15	47	46	41
20 Swindon Town	38	9	14	15	56	60	41
21 Yeovil Town	37	9	12	16	32	57	39
22 Brighton	37	9	11	18	42	60	35
23 Hereford United	36	8	6	22	32	59	30
24 Cheltenham Town	37	7	8	22	44	80	29

ENGLAND

Moyes Hails Maroune Fellaini's Impact At Everton

Everton manager David Moyes has hailed the contribution of Marouane Fellaini since his arrival at Goodison Park in September 2008.

The 21-year-old became the Toffees' record signing when they paid Standard Liege £15 million to secure his services, and his boss believes it has proven to be money well spent.

"For a foreigner to come in, we know how difficult it can be, but he has actually had quite a big impact on us," Moyes is quoted as saying in The Liverpool Daily Post.

"He has started to get a few goals for us. The one in the FA Cup [quarter-final against Middlesbrough last week] and the one today finished the game off really."

The Belgian international, who has scored twice in 12 caps, is the club's third top-scorer so far this season with six goals but Moyes feels he may be better suited to a more defensive role in the future.

"When he played for Standard Liege he played a little bit more advanced than the other midfield players and had an effect in the box so his role had a similarity to Tim Cahill," Moyes explained.

"But we see him in time stepping back and playing a role further back.

"I think he has had a really good first season in the Premier League for a young lad and in time we can build the team around him."

David Moyes is very pleased with Maroune Fellaini's performances for Everton

Benitez Urges Teams To Attack Manchester United

Liverpool manager Rafa Benitez thinks that his side's 4-1 mauling of Manchester United at Old Trafford yesterday has given a guiding a light for the rest of the Premier League to follow. Benitez says his team have shown that the Red Devils are vulnerable and can be unsettled.

He argues that if sides attack United, as Liverpool did yesterday, then they will enjoy more success than they thought possible. United's defenders, he states, are rarely put under serious pressure but when they are, Ferdinand and Vidic do have a tendancy to wobble.

"We have shown the way," the Reds manager told The Manchester Evening News.

"United have been playing with so much confidence. At least people will now see that they can lose.

"The message is there for everyone. In attack they are fantastic. You can see the quality they have. But, in defence, they have some weaknesses and we tried to exploit them."

Kolo Toure Refuses To Commit To Arsenal

Arsenal defender Kolo Toure has fuelled speculation that he may leave the club in the summer after making no promises over his long-term future.

The Ivory Coast defender handed in a transfer request at the start of the year during the January transfer window, and it was thought that the 27-year-old would leave Emirates Stadium.

The powerful centre-back had attracted interest from Manchester City, where Mark Hughes is desperate to increase his defensive options in a bid to qualify for Europe this season.

The Ivory Coast international has admitted that he does not get on with fellow defender William Gallas, and has stated that he was unhappy at the club at the start of the season.

Toure later withdrew his transfer request but is still unsure over where his future lies.

Despite this, the defender feels happy with the current set-up at the Emirates Stadium.

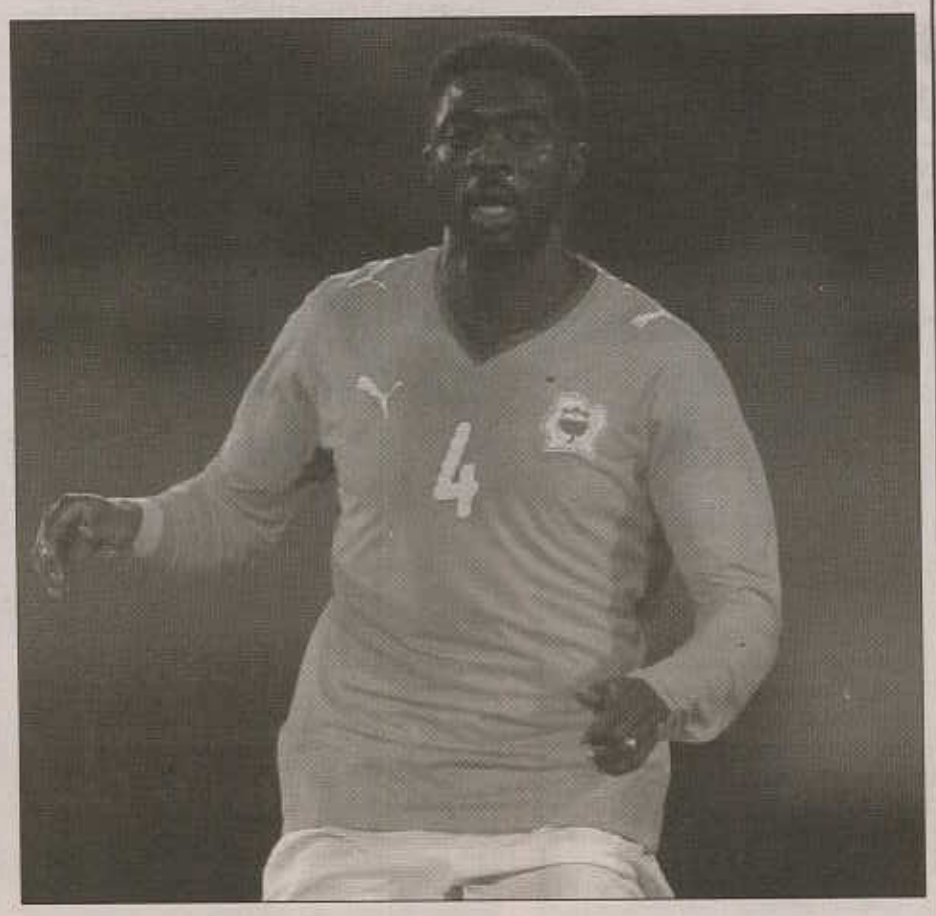
Speaking to The Sunday Express, Toure said, "In football you never know. I cannot say something today and then change it another day. I am quite happy at the moment playing and doing my best for the team. That's what is most important for me."

The Gunners have not won any silverware since the FA Cup win in 2005, and Toure feels this is a major concern for such a big club after going a season unbeaten in 2004.

"We want to win something every year but at the moment we aren't able to do that – so we are not very happy.

"The last time I won a trophy it was a great, great time for Arsenal. Those glory days can return soon, definitely. But we have to win at least one thing at the end of this season."

Toure moved to the Gunners in 2002 after being spotted by Arsene Wenger playing for Ivorian outfit ASEC Mimosas, and has gone on to make 218 Premier League appearances for the club, scoring 10 goals in the process.



Ivory Coast international Kolo Toure is yet to commit to Arsenal

Zola Not Surprised By Premier League Dominance

West Ham United manager Gianfranco Zola believes the English Premier League is the most competitive league in the world, typified by their top four's dominance in the Champions League.

The little Italian has plenty of experience in both the Premier League and Serie A, having made his name in Italy and moving to Chelsea to become one of England's best loved imports.

The former Italy international however, believes that the English game is now the best league in the world, and wasn't surprised to see Arsenal, Manchester United and Chelsea triumph over their Italian counterparts.

Speaking to Football365.com, Zola said, "It is a great moment for English football right now.

"In this country you can see that the top teams are producing results, quality football and big performances - not only at home but abroad and internationally.

"The football played in this country is the most competitive in Europe so it's not a surprise to me that the English sides went through against the Italians.

"They prepare the teams and the player to a higher level and that is why they are cruising in Europe, not just against the Italian teams but the Spanish also."

The Hammers boss has high hopes of taking his team to Europe next season, with a seventh place finish in the table seemingly good enough for qualification to the Europa League next season.

"Of course I hope one day to be there, competing with them in the Champions League," he added.

"We will see though, it depends how well I work, how well I do my job and how well the team does their job but that is one of the targets we have.

"It might be possible that seventh spot is enough for Europe this season and that would be a great thing for this club. Not just for the club to be in Europe, but for the players to play games internationally makes them better.

"I played many times as a player in European competition and I know how it can make a player better to play those kind of games."

The 42-year-old took over at Upton Park last year, and has placed great importance is scouring Europe for new exciting talents.

ENGLAND

Wenger Highlights Arsenal's Adaptability Without Fabregas

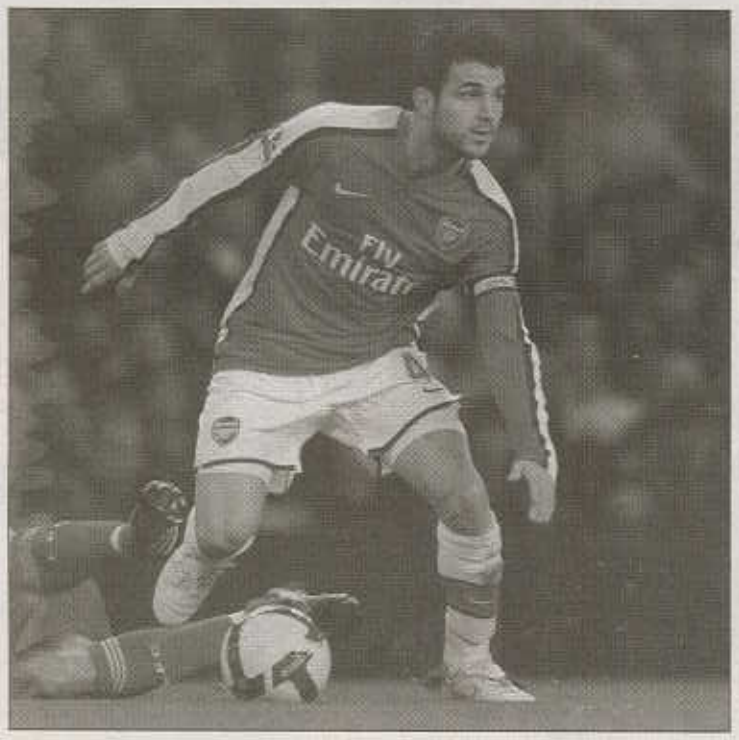
Francesc Fabregas is expected to make his long awaited return to Arsenal's first team after the international break, some three months after initially suffering an injury to his knee ligament following a clash with international team-mate Xabi Alonso during the 1-1 draw with Liverpool.

Since then, Arsenal have gone on an impressive streak recording zero losses in domestic competition, although they have recorded a lengthy list of draws in the process.

Arsene Wenger also bolstered his midfield with the signing of Andrey Arshavin - arguably the finest player available during the winter window - and the Russian attacker has given the north London outfit fresh impetus going forward, and is not shy of taking the initiative when it comes to the more creative aspects of the game.

Wenger today told Arsenal TV Online, that the team have had to find alternative routes to goal, is pleased that they have done so, but is eager to welcome his talismanic captain back to the fold.

"I believe we will all be happy when Cesc comes back but we had to cope without him and of course, I believe it will be a big lift for everybody when he's back. But we had to do without him," the Frenchman explained.



The Gunners have done well without captain Cesc Fabregas in the past few months

"When he's there, everything goes through him but when he's not it can take a while to adapt because the game goes through different ways – it's plural.

"When it's Fabregas it is more one-way traffic at the start of the build-up."

In Fabregas' absence, squad players such as Alexandre Song and Abou Diaby have had to deputise, partnering Denilson in central midfield.

Chelsea Set Sights On Barcelona's Dani Alves

According to a report in British tabloid newspaper The Daily Mirror, Premier League club Chelsea are preparing an end of season offer for Barcelona's Dani Alves.

Having spent lavishly during his first few years as owner of the Blues, Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich has cut spending in the last couple of seasons, but it seems that he is ready to sanction yet another shopping spree.

The Brazilian international full-back, who has won 19 caps to date, is apparently the west London outfit's top target this summer, although they may have to offer an astronomical sum of money to land him.

Chelsea are again after Barcelona's Dani Alves

The 25-year-old only joined la Blaugrana last summer in a deal thought to be worth €27 million (£25m), so Chelsea may have to meet his €97.5m (£90m) minimum fee release clause if they are going to land him.

Ronaldo Wants To Stay At 'Brilliant' Manchester United

Cristiano Ronaldo has once again insisted that he is perfectly happy at present at Manchester United, and appreciates the opportunities that being at such a successful club provide for him. The long-term future, he insists, is in the hands of the Almighty.

"I feel very happy where I am now," he told Setanta Sports. "I feel very good in Manchester. [We] compete for four titles - I have to appreciate that.

"The future? Only God knows. I prefer to speak about the present. The present is brilliant. I feel very happy here. I want to stay here. I don't want to go anywhere.

"I want to win, if I have the opportunity, again. I am quite happy with my season."

Playing alongside quality additions to the United squad this season, Dimitar Berbatov for example, is also something that Ronaldo appreciates, and he is unconcerned about which position he is selected in, just as long as the manager continues to name him in the starting line-up.

"The team is fantastic, " he said. "It's quite different to play with different players. It's quite different with Berbatov.

"It's changed a little bit, but it's good. If I play I am quite happy."

Cristiano Ronaldo says he is very happy to be apart of a brilliant Manchester United team

As for United's challenge across such a wide range of honours this season, the Portuguese felt that the developing experience within the side was one vital factor, adding, "The team is more mature, more experienced, and when they go on the pitch they know what they're going to do.

"This is why we have a good team. It's good to be part of this team."

When quizzed about his Ballon D'Or win last year, the forward highlighted that it was a great feeling to be named as the best player in the world, but also insisted that collective achievements gave him just as much pleasure.

"It's always important to win individual things, " he continued. "But we have to mention the collective - the Champions League is an amazing feeling, and the league.

"It's an unbelievable feeling. Like you are in heaven. the feeling is very good."

As for the continuing speculation linking him with moves away from Old Trafford, Ronaldo dismissed it as part and parcel of his occupation, something which, with his own strength and the backing of friends and family, he could ignore while getting on with the job he loves.

He concluded, "I am always very strong, mentally and physically. I have good friends and good family.

"I'm very happy. I like to do what I do. It's my dream, my life."

Warnock considers suing West Ham over Tevez

Former Sheffield United manager Neil Warnock is taking legal advice over whether to pursue a personal compensation claim against West Ham United over the Carlos Tevez affair.

The Blades and West Ham settled the long-running affair out of court on Monday with the Hammers agreeing to pay their rivals an undisclosed fee believed to be as high £25m following the Sheffield club's relegation in 2007.

West Ham were fined £5.5m by the Premier League for failing to fully disclose the terms of the deal that brought Tevez and Argentinian compatriot Javier Mascherano to England.

Sheffield United claim Tevez's goals kept the Hammers in the top flight at their expense, with Warnock resigning three days after their relegation.

Warnock has long contended that he and Sheffield United's relegated players could sue West Ham for loss of earnings resulting from their relegation to the Championship.

The 60-year-old, now manager of Crystal Palace, told the Daily Mail: "I'll be looking into this now. I just wanted to see the club's case out of the way first.

"As far as I'm concerned, I should still be a Premier League manager. And I think the players have a case, too."

Warnock is not alone in considering taking matter further with reports in The Times suggesting that as many as 20 past and present Sheffield United's players are considering their own legal action against the Hammers for loss of wages and bonuses.

Referring to the settlement, Warnock continued: "It justifies what we've said all along. We've had a lot of people criticise us for taking it this far - but that's what justice is all about. But this still doesn't make it right for me or the United fans - or anyone else involved."

Warnock reiterated his view that Premier League chief executive Richard Scudamore should have resigned over the affair and believes a bigger club would have been treated differently.

"I think Scudamore is an absolute disgrace," added Warnock. "I'd love to get him in a room on my own for an hour, no holds barred. If it was any other club, Scudamore would have made sure the facts came out. I find it amazing that he has kept his job.

"If it had been a big club, the truth would have come out earlier and it would have been sorted."

A joint investigation by the Premier League and Football Association into the Tevez and Mascherano signings is ongoing.

Warnock is confident the Blades would have established themselves as a Premier League team had it not been for the Tevez saga.

"I don't think anything can really compensate you for losing your Premiership status. Everybody knows it was my dream job," Warnock told Sky Sports News. "I think we could have been an established Premier League side. You only have to look at Phil Jagielka, the way he's playing now (for Everton).

"We had high hopes of taking the club forward by our first summer, spending the money to keep up there like one or two other clubs have done in the past. I know the players are looking again and I'll be seeking legal advice myself but at the moment I'm not going to say any more than that.

"I've been in touch with the legal people. We've been adamant right from day one that if the rules had been adhered to we wouldn't have been relegated."

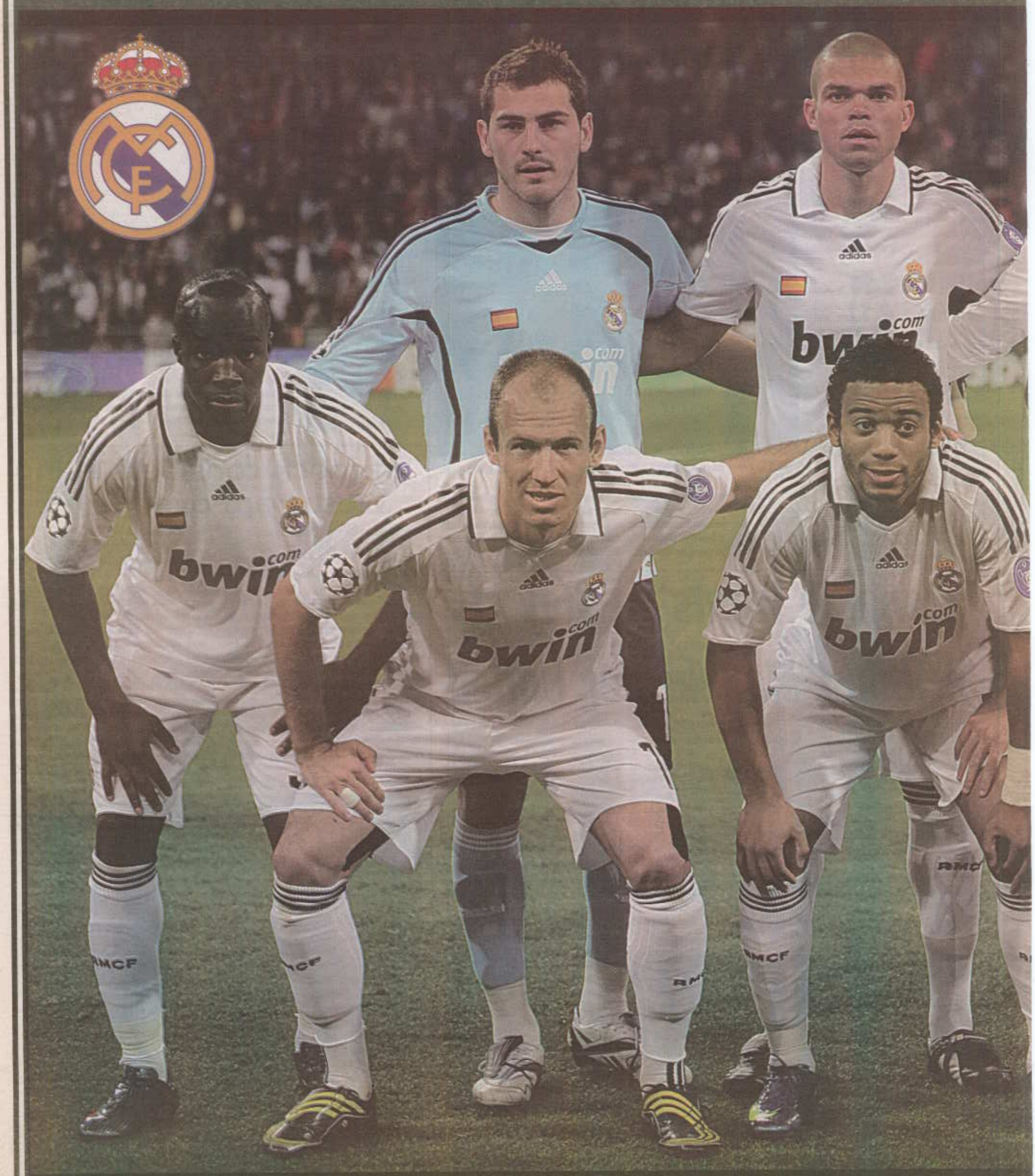
West Ham issued a statement saying they will do everything they can to prevent "legal anarchy" breaking.

The club said: "Despite the extensive media coverage, West Ham United have received no formal legal claims from Sheffield United players or their previous manager relating to the so-called Tevez affair.

"The club have settled the matter of compensation, as ruled upon by Lord Griffiths, with Sheffield United and can see no basis for claims being brought outside of the arbitration process, established by the Football Association, which has now been brought to a close.

"However, it is now becoming clear that the ruling by Lord Griffiths has encouraged a potentially endless legal chain of claims and counter claims, which can only be damaging to English football.

REAL MA



Back Row (L-R): Iker Casillas, Pepe, Ser
Front Row (L-R): Lassana Diarra, Arjen Robben, M

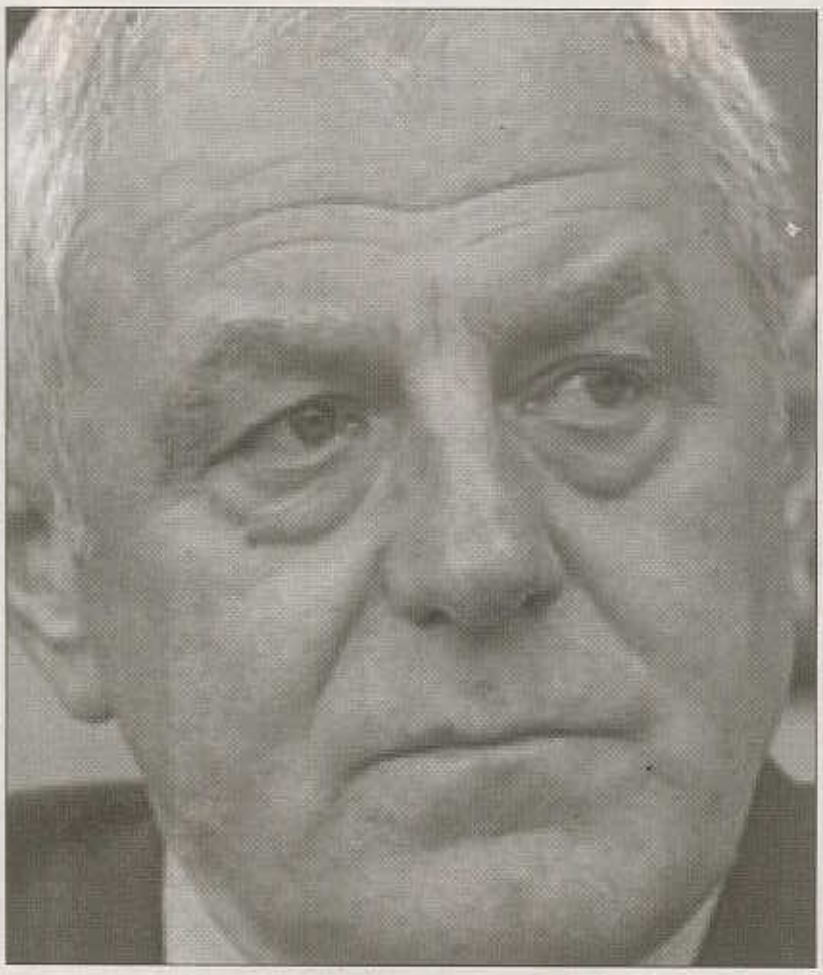
DRID F.C.

gio Ramos, Ruben Gago, Gabriel Heinze
arcelo, Gonzalo Higuain, Raul, Fabio Cannavaro

SCOTLAND

SCOTTISH PREMIER LEAGUE

		P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1	Celtic	28	19	6	3	62	27	63
2	Rangers	29	18	7	4	59	22	61
3	Heart of Midlothian	30	14	7	9	33	32	49
4	Aberdeen	30	12	8	10	34	30	44
5	Dundee United	29	11	10	8	38	36	43
6	Hibernian	30	10	10	10	33	35	40
7	Motherwell	30	11	7	12	34	38	40
8	Hamilton Academical	30	10	3	17	25	41	33
9	Kilmarnock	30	8	6	16	27	40	30
10	St Mirren	29	7	9	13	23	39	30
11	Inverness	30	8	4	18	29	49	28
12	Falkirk	29	6	9	14	32	40	27



Next Fixtures:

Saturday, April 4

Dundee United v Hibernian
Heart of Midlothian v Kilmarnock
Inverness Caledonian Thistle v St Mirren
Motherwell v Aberdeen
Celtic v Hamilton Academical

Sunday, April 5

Falkirk v Rangers

Rangers 2 Heart of Midlothian 2

Rangers were held to a 2-2 draw by Hearts at Ibrox as their hopes of claiming the Clydesdale Bank Premier League title diminished further.

Walter Smith's men appeared to be cruising following goals from Kyle Lafferty and Barry Ferguson but were pegged back by a Hearts side who had been ineffective for an hour before Christos Karipidis and Ruben Palazuelos struck.

The result means Celtic are now in a position to extend their lead to five points at the summit if they beat Dundee United on Sunday.

Rangers were forced to go with a makeshift central defence of Lee McCulloch and Christian Dailly after both Madjid Bougherra and Kirk Broadfoot failed late fitness tests, with David Weir also absent through suspension.

But, far from take advantage of any defensive frailties within the Rangers rearguard, Hearts were forced to deal with most of the pressure in the first half.

Rangers knew they needed a positive reaction following the defeat to Celtic in the Co-operative Insurance Cup final.

Steven Whittaker called Jamie MacDonald - in for the suspended Janos Balogh - into action early on with a superb volley from distance which the Hearts goalkeeper smothered at the post.

But MacDonald was plucking the ball out of the back of the net with nine minutes gone.

DaMarcus Beasley pounced on a bad pass from David Obua before setting up Lafferty for the shot as he bore down on goal and clinically slotted home.

Rangers could have added to their lead when Steven Davis delivered into the path of Whittaker a few yards out after good work from Lafferty but the full-back poked agonisingly wide of the upright.

There was concern for Rangers when Lafferty pulled up with an ankle injury and, despite initially returning to the pitch after treatment, he was eventually forced out of the action and replaced by Nacho Novo 10 minutes before half-time.

Rangers pushed for a second goal and Barry Ferguson teed up the shot for Davis, whose thunderous strike was deflected just inches wide of target.

But it was the skipper himself who found the back of the net on the stroke of half-time when Mendes rolled the ball to Ferguson in plenty of space and he lashed home from six yards.

Ferguson could have added to his tally shortly after the restart but blasted well over from a Novo lay-off. Novo then squandered a great chance when he raced onto a Davis pass and smacked his shot off the post.

The warning signs arrived for Rangers when substitute Calum Elliot drew an excellent save from goalkeeper Allan McGregor, before Hearts pulled a goal back after 64 minutes.

A Bruno Aguiar corner sparked a goalmouth scramble before the ball broke to Karipidis who nodded home despite Beasley's attempted goal-line clearance.

Hearts were then back on level terms just three minutes later. Obua did well to beat Sasa Papac before passing to Elliot who nodded into the path of Palazuelos to drive low into the net.

Rangers pushed forward in search of the goal that would put them back in front but Mendes saw his volley blocked by MacDonald.

The midfielder was then booked for diving after appearing to be tripped on the edge of the box by Aguiar.

Instead it was Hearts who could have snatched victory at the end when McGregor was called into action to tip wide from Elliot before Rangers left the pitch to jeers at the final whistle.

Kilmarnock 0 Motherwell 0

Kilmarnock and Motherwell failed to get an early advantage on their Clydesdale Bank Premier League rivals as they fought out a goalless draw at Rugby Park.

The home side dominated the first half but failed to trouble Graeme Smith, and the unmarked Kevin Kyle headed wide from 12 yards after the break.

Motherwell improved, and substitute David Clarkson missed a good chance in injury-time not long after Smith had pushed away Manuel Pascali's header.

The result did not suit either team, with Killie still looking over their shoulder as they continue to chase their first SPL win of 2009.

Motherwell also failed to use the lunchtime kick-off to put maximum pressure on their rivals in the race for a top-six and European place.

Kilmarnock quickly imposed themselves on the game, and Garry Hay shot wide from 20 yards after forcing back Motherwell striker John Sutton back and dispossessing him.

Sutton's partner Cillian Sheridan headed Stevie Hammell's free-kick wide of the near post, but Kilmarnock continued to edge play.

Smith was fully behind Craig Bryson's left-foot volley, before David Fernandez was off target from a difficult diving header following good wing play from Hay.

Recalled pair Mehdi Taouil and Fernandez were at the heart of Kilmarnock's promising build-up play as they stretched Motherwell inside the visitors' half, but they failed to carve out a clear-cut first-half chance.

Smith gratefully clutched the ball after his team-mates desperately defended Tim Clancy's throw-in, and Kyle saw a shot blocked in a crowded goalmouth. Motherwell manager Mark McGhee complained to a policeman after exchanging words with some home fans as he disputed Dougie McDonald's harsh decision to penalise Stephen Craigan's shoulder charge on Fernandez.

Sheridan almost snatched an opener but headed just wide as he stretched to meet a Stephen Hughes cross.

Motherwell showed more urgency to get forward after the restart, and Jim O'Brien fired just over on the half-volley after Sutton had headed on Paul Quinn's cross.

Killie were still dangerous, though, and Mark Reynolds was booked for hauling back Fernandez as he ran on to Taouil's through ball just outside the box on the right channel. The unmarked Taouil shot well over, after Hay's free-kick was blocked.

Kyle missed a clear chance in the 63rd minute when his free header from Hay's cross just cleared the top corner from 12 yards.

Clarkson and Steven McGarry came on to liven up Motherwell's attack. But they were soon grateful for Hammell's brilliant headed clearance as Jamie Hamill attacked Hay's cross.

Maros Klimpl's deflected strike fizzed just over from 20 yards, after McGarry had left Fernandez in a heap to start a counter-attack.

The game was finely-balanced, and Alan Combe just reached Clarkson's diagonal ball before McGarry.

Smith pulled off the save of the match with nine minutes left as he pushed out Manuel Pascali's header from Taouil's near-post corner.

Klimpl then burst past two opponents to reach Clarkson's through ball but he never looked confident as he entered the box, and his weak left-footed shot was straight at Combe.

The ball then fell for the unmarked Clarkson 12 yards out after Hammell's injury-time corner, but the Scotland striker volleyed just over.

Falkirk 4 Inverness Caledonian Thistle 0

Falkirk collected a priceless 4-0 victory to move to within one point of second-bottom Inverness at the foot of the Clydesdale Bank Premier League.

Carl Finnigan scored twice, and Mark Stewart and Scott Arfield also got on the scoresheet against Terry Butcher's side.

Inverness were reduced to 10 men in the 80th minute when goalkeeper Ryan Esson was sent off for bringing down Finnigan in the box, allowing Arfield to covert the spot-kick.

The victory for the Bairns breathes fresh life into their survival hopes as they took full advantage of a lacklustre Inverness display.

Hamilton Academical 0 St Mirren 0

Hamilton goalkeeper Tomas Cerny was sent off for a foul on Craig Dargo as the Accies and St Mirren served up a dire Clydesdale Bank Premier League stalemate at New Douglas Park.

Hamilton midfielder James McCarthy crashed a shot off the post two minutes before the break after Kenny Deuchar had fired over the crossbar from close range.

There was little improvement after the break although Garry Brady wasted a decent chance to grab the breakthrough for the lacklustre visitors when he blazed over from 12 yards.

Eight minutes from time, as Dargo raced through on goal, Cerny brought the former Killie player crashing to the ground outside the box, leaving referee Stephen Finnie little option but to show him the red card.

Hibernian 0 Aberdeen 0

Hibernian were left to rue a host of missed chances as they could only manage a goalless draw against Aberdeen.

The Dons were reduced to 10 men with seven minutes remaining when Mark Kerr was sent off for an apparent head-butt on home skipper Rob Jones, who was also booked for his part in the tussle.

However, it was the Easter Road side's failure to convert the opportunities which fell to Derek Riordan, Colin Nish and Steven Fletcher which prevented them from racking up a third consecutive victory.

Fletcher was perhaps the biggest culprit as he completely missed his volley with the goal gaping in a second half largely dominated by the home team against visitors looking to recover from their midweek Scottish Cup exit to Dunfermline.

The draw maintained the four-point gap between the teams and kept Hibs in the top six and in the hunt for a Europa League place.

ITALY

JUVE SMASH ROMA

Modric to Juventus?

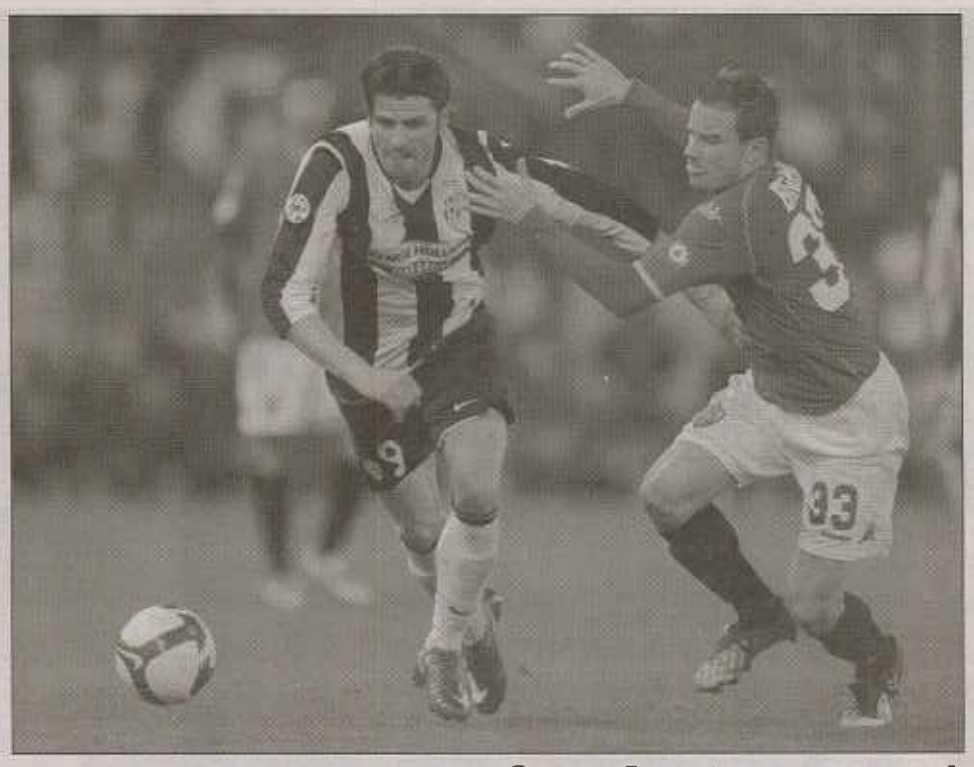
Alberto Aquilani will stay at Roma

◆This summer transfers will be very different - Galliani
◆Ibrahimovic not leaving Inter - Agent
◆Full Wrap Italian Serie A

ITALY

ITALIAN SERIE A

		P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1	Internazionale	28	20	6	2	51	21	66
2	Juventus	29	19	5	5	51	23	62
3	AC Milan	28	16	6	6	51	28	54
4	Genoa	28	13	9	6	37	27	48
5	Fiorentina	28	14	4	10	38	29	46
6	AS Roma	29	13	7	9	44	41	46
7	Palermo	28	13	3	12	39	37	42
8	Lazio	29	12	5	12	39	41	41
9	Cagliari	28	11	6	11	33	29	39
10	Atalanta	28	12	3	13	33	31	39
11	Catania	29	10	7	12	30	34	37
12	Napoli	28	10	6	12	33	33	36
13	Udinese	28	9	9	10	38	39	36
14	Sampdoria	28	8	9	11	28	35	33
15	Siena	28	8	7	13	23	31	31
16	Chievo Verona	28	6	9	13	24	36	27
17	Bologna	28	6	8	14	31	46	26
18	Torino	28	5	9	14	25	42	24
19	Lecce	28	4	11	13	24	46	23
20	Reggina	28	3	11	14	22	45	20



AS Roma 1
Juventus 4

Juventus moved back to within four points of Serie A leaders Inter Milan with a comprehensive 4-1 victory away to Roma tonight.

Vincenzo Iaquinta scored twice with Olof Mellberg and Pavel Nedved also on target for Claudio Ranieri's side, who showed no mercy for a depleted Roma side.

Roma's consolation came from Simone Loria, who responded to the first of Iaquinta's goals to bring the home side level three minutes into the second half, but there was no way back after Iaquinta grabbed his and Juve's second in the 55th minute.

League leaders Inter host Reggina tomorrow and can restore their seven-point lead at the top of the table with a win while Roma can slip five points behind fourth place if either Genoa or Fiorentina win tomorrow.

Roma were without 11 members of their first-team squad due to injury and suspension, leaving coach Luciano Spalletti with a battle on his hand just to get 11 fit players on the pitch.

He succeeded, but that was the only victory he was able to celebrate on a torrid night at the Stadio Olimpico.

It could have started perfectly for the Giallorossi had John Arne Riise's first-minute volley finished inside of the post.

Minutes later, the home side had another good chance with Riise chasing down a ball which Zdenek Grygera had left to go out for a goal kick. The Roma full-back reached the ball and pulled it back to Jeremy Menez, but Giorgio Chiellini threw himself in front of the Frenchman's shot.

Juve went ahead in the 34th minute with a fine team move which started with a determined tackle from Cristian Molinaro deep in his own half.

He sent Christian Poulsen on his way and the Dane exchanged passes with Sebastian Giovinco, who in turn played the ball into the path of Iaquinta, who shifted into the penalty area onto his preferred right foot before unleashing an unstoppable shot into the far corner past Doni.

Roma got the start they needed to the second half with an equaliser coming after less than three minutes.

Menez's low corner from the left made its way through a crowd of players to Loria, who swivelled to place his left-footed shot into the bottom corner of Gianluigi Buffon's goal.

Juve were back in front in the 55th minute as Iaquinta grabbed his second of the night.

Grygera's cross deflected up off Riise to the Juve striker, who beat Philippe Mexes to the ball and nodded it past Doni from five yards.

Seven minutes later Juve should have added a third, but they squandered the chance, despite having four men up against two Roma defenders.

Alessandro del Piero put Iaquinta through, but he could not get a shot in this time as the ball squirmed loose back to Del Piero, whose shot was saved on the line by Riise.

Mellberg did add a third in the 68th minute when he rose to meet Del Piero's corner with a determined header into the top corner of Doni's goal.

Nedved completed the scoring just minutes after coming on to replace Tiago with a fine volley from 20 yards which, again, left Doni no chance in the Roma goal as he picked the ball out of the back of his net for the fourth and last time in the 74th minute.

Catania 1
Lazio 0

Lazio striker Goran Pandev missed a penalty as his team fell to defeat at Catania today, their second Serie A loss on the trot.

Michele Paolucci had put the hosts ahead in the 24th minute before Pandev saw his spot-kick saved by Catania goalkeeper Albano Bizzarri just after the hour mark.

Catania merited the victory and are now 13 points off the relegation zone ahead of the rest of the weekend's fixtures.

It was a disappointing performance from Lazio who could find themselves eight points off a European berth by Sunday night.

Catania started brightly and had Lazio pegged back into their own half from the off.

However, Pandev created a rare opportunity for the Biancocelesti in the ninth minute as he carved out some space for himself but wasted it as he blazed his effort over the crossbar.

Giuseppe Mascara came close to putting Catania in front minutes later but his free-kick just missed the corner of the goal frame .

Pablo Ledesma should have given the hosts the lead when a scrambled clearance from a corner fell to him on the edge of the area but he powered the ball into Row Z.

However, Catania did not have to wait much longer as a quick counter-attack from a Lazio corner saw them take the lead in somewhat fortunate circumstances when a miskick by Ledesma saw the ball fall to Paolucci to slot it into an empty net.

Mascara was causing havoc down the left flank and causing problems for Lazio who had enough troubles of their own as they lacked even a spark of creativity.

The Catania striker could have doubled his side's lead in the 35th minute but sent his effort just wide of the target from the edge of the area before almost spectacularly scoring direct from a corner five minutes later.

Lazio would have gone in at the break on level terms had Pasquale Foggia's header not missed the top corner by a hair's breadth a minute from the break before an incredible stop by Bizzarri ensured his team maintained their advantage.

The capital club improved somewhat after the break and could have equalised immediately after the restart but first Foggia's long-range shot sailed narrowly over before Bizzarri pulled off a good save to deny Cristian Ledesma.

However, Lazio's chances were to be few and far between as Catania began to regain control of the game.

Nevertheless, the Biancocelesti had a golden opportunity to level matters when Matias Silvestre fouled Pandev in the area and the referee pointed to the spot.

However, the Macedonia striker saw his somewhat tame penalty saved by Bizzarri.

That was to be Lazio's last real opportunity as Catania dug in deep to secure all three points.

ITALIAN SERIE B

Livorno 2	Ancona 3
Castellani Empoli ..3	Sassuolo 2
Triestina 0	Parma 3
US Avellino 2	Pisa 0
Piacenza 3	Frosinone 0
Bari 2	Cittadella 0
Mantova 1	Rimini 0
Ascoli 2	Albinoleffe 2
Modena 3	Vicenza 1

		P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1	Bari	31	15	12	4	40	25	57
2	Parma	31	14	13	4	42	24	55
3	Livorno	31	12	17	2	44	24	53
4	Sassuolo	31	13	11	7	42	30	50
5	Brescia	31	14	8	9	38	27	50
6	Triestina	31	13	9	9	42	32	48
7	Albinoleffe	31	12	11	8	34	29	47
8	Grosseto	31	13	6	12	48	53	45
9	Empoli	31	12	8	11	33	35	44
10	Pisa	31	11	9	11	39	41	42
11	Rimini	31	10	10	11	34	38	40
12	Piacenza	31	11	7	13	31	35	40
13	Vicenza	31	9	12	10	33	26	39
14	Ascoli	31	11	8	12	27	31	39
15	Ancona	31	11	5	15	40	44	38
16	Frosinone	31	9	10	12	36	41	37
17	Cittadella	31	7	14	10	30	32	35
18	Mantova	31	8	10	13	28	37	34
19	Salernitana	31	9	6	16	30	43	33
20	Modena	31	6	11	14	39	49	29
21	Treviso	31	5	13	13	29	42	27
22	US Avellino	31	5	12	14	26	47	25

Next Fixtures:

Sunday, April 5

Atalanta v Fiorentina
Reggina v Genoa
AS Roma v Bologna
Cagliari v Catania
Juventus v Chievo
Siena v Lazio
Sampdoria v Napoli
Palermo v Torino
Udinese v Internazionale
AC Milan v Lecce

ITALY

Alberto Aquilani Will Stay At Roma - Agent

Alberto Aquilani's long and drawn out contract saga continues, as the Italian international has yet to pen a new deal with Roma.

His current deal expires in June of 2010, but the player's representative is confident that the 24-year-old will remain as a member of the Giallorossi.

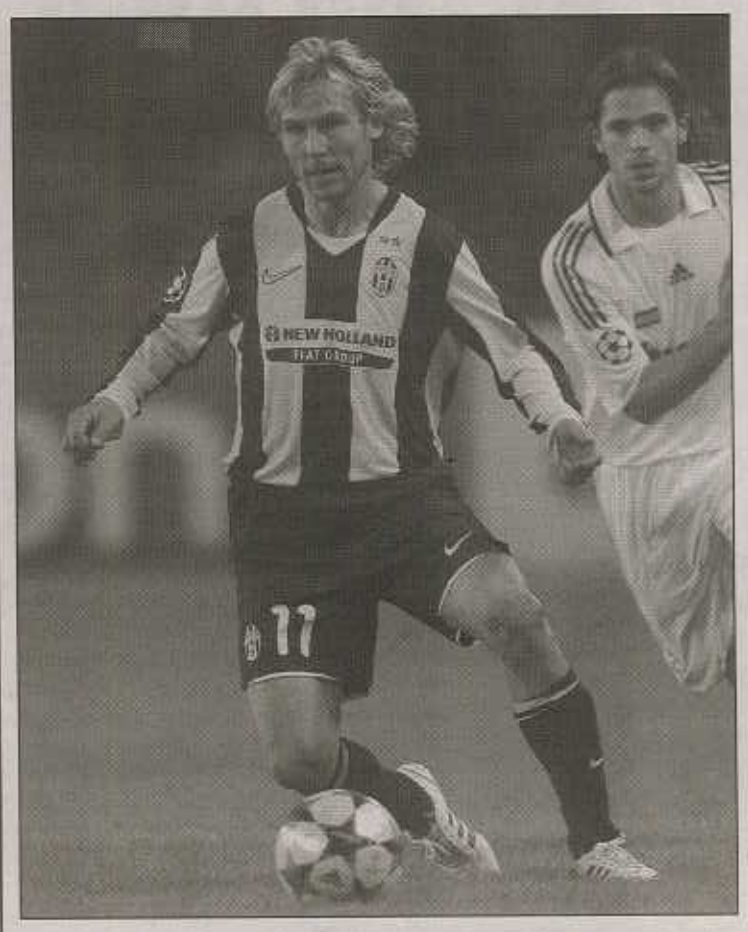
"There are no problems with [Roma president] Rosella Sensi. We are waiting to have some final questions answered by Roma," his agent, Franco Zavaglia, revealed to Radio Kiss Kiss.

"With these kinds of contracts, you need a certain period of time to define everything. Aquilani's desire is to remain with the Giallorossi, so I do not think there will be any big problems."

Aquilani came through the Roma youth team system and made his first appearance for the club in 2002. He has made over 100 appearances for the club in his career and has become known for his dynamic midfield play.

However, his current campaign has been blighted by injury and the Euro 2008 call-up has only made 19 appearances in all competitions as a result.

We Want Nedved To Stay - Juventus Administrator Montali



Juventus would love Pavel Nedved to remain at the club to help the youngsters through the ranks

Unless there are any surprising twists, the next two months will be the last of Juventus icon Pavel Nedved as a professional footballer.

However, it's likely that many at the club will try to convince the Czech Ballon d'Or winner to stay on for one more year. Juventus administrator Gian Paolo Montali is one of those people.

"What I wanted to tell Nedved is that he is an example, and players like him are a rare breed," he said to Sky.

"It's clear that the only thing that might bother him is that he will play less in the future, because he is used to be a first team player, someone who is always on the pitch.

"However, if he understands that his contribution to the team is of a very high value also off the pitch, with his behaviour, I think he could be convinced to stay another year.

"He could really help these young players who are coming through. He always puts in a lot of heart and passion in what he does. With those qualities he could also become a very fine coach."

Nedved joined Juve from Lazio in 2001. Since then he has won two Serie A titles, four if you include those revoked in 2005 and 2006, and was honored with the Ballon d'Or trophy in 2003, when he led the team to the Champions League final.

Luka Modric Linked With Summer Transfer To Juventus

According to a report in the British tabloid The Sun, Serie A giants Juventus may make an offer for Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Luka Modric at the end of the season.

It is claimed that the Old Lady have identified the Croatia international as an ideal replacement for 36-year-old Pavel Nedved, who is set to retire when this campaign concludes.

The 23-year-old only arrived at White Hart Lane last summer after Spurs agreed to pay Croatian club Dinamo Zagreb €17.5 million (£16.5m) to acquire his services.

Although he has only found the back of net three times in 35 appearances for the north London-based outfit this season, the 5ft 8in midfielder has impressed with his all-round displays.

Apparently, when asked whether Modric could realistically join the Bianconeri, his agent, Sabatino Durante, replied, "He certainly could but a lot depends on the economic situation.

"Modric will not leave London for any less than €24 million (£22.5m). He has been one of the best midfielders in Europe for the last two or three years because he has just the right mix of quantity and quality.

"He can play in Nedved's position [or] just behind the strikers. Basically, he can do everything."

This Summer's Transfer Market Will Be Very Different - Milan Chief Galliani

Adriano Galliani has already spoken about how the current global financial crisis has not left football alone.

After Italy's disastrous week in the Champions League, he argued it was more to do with economic factors, and particularly the ownership of stadiums, than anything else.

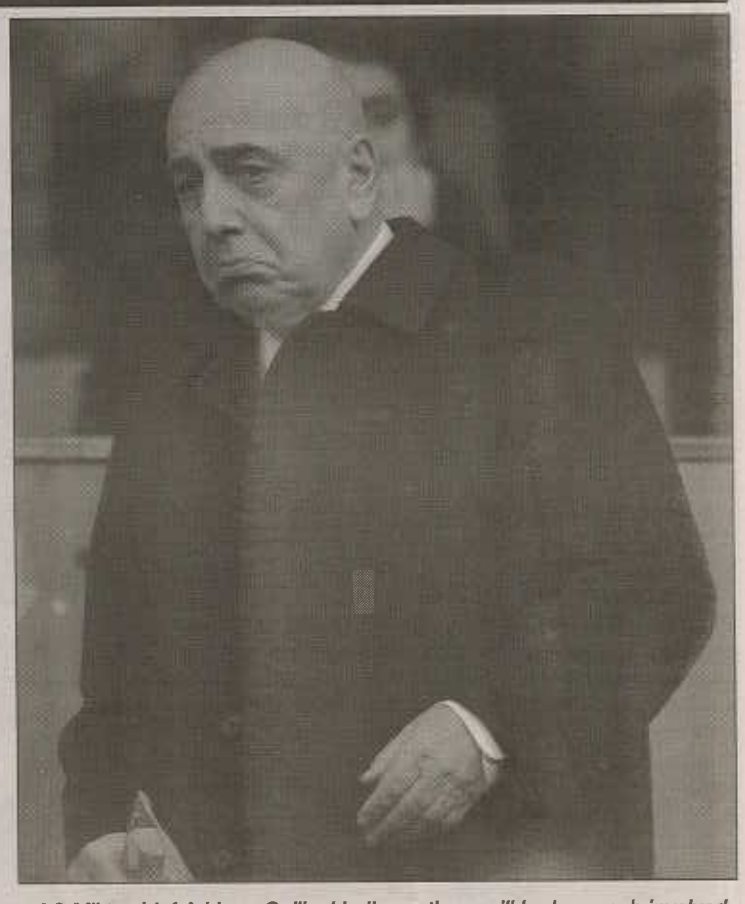
Now, Galliani, who was arriving for an informal league meeting, has warned Milan fans that this summer's shopping spree is going to be unique.

"There are going to be lots of swaps and exchange of players, rather than cash," he began, according to TuttoMercatoWeb.

"Some clubs can still afford to put a lot of money down, but many can't, I am sure of it."

On the possibility of buying a new custodian after Christian Abbiati's injury, Milan's No.2 said, "We will not be buying a 'keeper, in the past we won the World Club Cup and Champions League with [Nelson] Dida and [Zeljko] Kalac, so they will do fine while we wait for Abbiati."

Milan are currently refusing to talk about their city rivals, and so when journalists asked if Nerazzurri full-back Maxwell was a target, Galliani answered, "I do not want to speak about Inter or any of their players."



AC Milan chief Adriano Galliani believes there will be less cash involved in transfers this summer

ITALY

Baptista:

Roma Icon Totti? Not One Of The Best

Baptista does not believe Francesco Totti is as good as Roma make him out to be

Roma forward Julio Baptista has played with and against many important players during his career, but Francesco Totti does not feature in his top three.

Baptista opted to give the first spot to retired star Zinedine Zidane, whom he considers the best player he ever saw.

"Let's go in order: Zidane in first place, Ronaldo in second, but the bronze medal goes to Ronaldinho, because at Barcelona he was phenomenal," declared the former Real Madrid player to Guerin Sportivo.

"Maybe if I had played some years ago with Francesco [Totti], I would have placed him amongst the top three, but now he is at the end of his career.

On the other hand, there are other players who impressed him a lot at Roma.

"[Daniele] De Rossi, but also [Vincenzo] Montella is good," he explained. "He's the most Brazilian of the team, with a carioca dribbling.

"For the future, I would confide in [Alberto] Aquilani."

The 27-year-old player joined Roma last summer and in 21 league games has scored eight goals for the club.

Ronaldinho Ordered To Pay €10,000 Compensation To Architect

Milan star Ronaldinho and his agent brother Roberto de Assis have been ordered to pay an architect around €10,000 by a tribunal in Brazil.

Sport.es report the legendary playmaker refused to pay Maria Cristina Gardolinski for work she had carried out on his home in Porto Alegre. The Spanish paper claims the architect had installed new lighting arrangements in his house, but the neither the Brazilian ace nor his brother wanted to pay for the services and work which was carried out.

Gardolinski took Ronaldinho to court and, according to reports, she has won the battle. It is believed the judge ruled in the architect's favour. 'Dinho and his brother De Assis, who played a major part in last year's Milan transfer, will now have to pay compensation after he was ordered to verse €10,000 towards Gardolinski.

The Rossoneri No. 80 has not enjoyed the best of season's this term as has struggled to find a regular starting role in Carlo Ancelotti's starting XI.

Maxwell Will Certainly Leave Inter - Agent

After the emergence of youth team member Davide Santon into the Inter line-up, Maxwell has seemingly lost his place at left-back to the 18-year-old starlet and is considering his options.

The player's agent, Mino Raiola, has confirmed that the 27-year-old will move clubs at the end of the season, listing some possible high-profile destinations for his client.

"He has a lot of quality, but he is not as physical a player as [Inter coach Jose] Mourinho wants. The conclusion is that they will part ways," revealed Raiola to Radio Radio.

"Maxwell is a typical player who can go to any European club. I'm glad that he was praised by a good coach like [Milan's Carlo] Ancelotti. I can see him joining a team like AC Milan, Arsenal, Real Madrid, or Barcelona."

The 27-year-old joined Inter from Ajax in the summer of 2006 and has made over 70 league appearances for the Beneamata during that period. He has rarely featured in the side since a 3-1 loss to Atalanta in January.

Will Maxwell make the move from Inter to AC Milan, or move to another league next season?

Ibrahimovic Is Not Leaving Inter - Agent

Zlatan Ibrahimovic's agent, Mino Raiola, has said he client is not leaving Inter...

Currently, the Sweden forward sits in second place in the scorers' chart with 17 goals in 28 Serie A games.

There had been rumours he might be leaving the Beneamata in the summer, possibly for Barcelona, but these have been refuted by his agent, Mino Raiola, who spoke to Radio Radio TV.

"Maybe Ibrahimovic will leave Milan, there is not much space in the centre of the city to play with football with the kids," the man joked.

"He will not leave, unless [Inter president Massimo] Moratti decides to sell him," the big striker's representative continued, "Otherwise we will have to see what happens when his current contract ends in four years time.

"Only certain teams could afford someone who is in the same league as [Lionel] Messi, [Didier] Drogba, Cristiano Ronaldo and [Alexandre] Pato. They are Chelsea, Liverpool, Real Madrid, Barcelona, Inter, Milan and Manchester United.

"I think he is worth €100 million because he is the most complete player in the world."

SPAIN START

VILLAREAL CLOSING GAP

Barca want Villa, Ribery Messi frontline

Deco linked to Atletico Madrid

◆ Raul to coach Real Madrid or Atletico Madrid?
◆Full Wrap of the Spanish Primera Division

SPAIN

VILLAREAL CLOSING THE GAP

SPANISH PRIMERA DIVISION

		P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1	Barcelona	27	21	3	3	78	24	66
2	Real Madrid	27	19	3	5	63	31	60
3	Sevilla FC	28	16	6	6	42	26	54
4	Villarreal	28	13	9	6	45	37	48
5	Atlético Madrid	27	12	7	8	56	41	43
6	Málaga	27	12	7	8	45	40	43
7	Deportivo La Coruña	27	12	6	9	36	36	42
8	Valencia	27	11	7	9	47	48	40
9	Valladolid	28	12	3	13	42	46	39
10	Racing Santander	27	8	9	10	34	34	33
11	Sporting Gijon	27	11	0	16	35	57	33
12	Almeria	27	8	7	12	33	43	31
13	Athletic Bilbao	28	8	7	13	37	48	31
14	Recreativo Huelva	27	7	9	11	26	38	30
15	Real Betis	27	7	8	12	37	43	29
16	Mallorca	27	7	8	12	31	46	29
17	Getafe	27	6	10	11	36	41	28
18	Osasuna	27	5	11	11	27	33	26
19	Numancia	27	7	2	18	28	55	23
20	Espanyol	27	4	10	13	25	44	22

Next Fixtures:

Sunday, April 5

Real Betis v Numancia
Sporting Gijon v Racing Santander
Málaga v Real Madrid
Recreativo Huelva v Sevilla FC
Espanyol v Deportivo La Coruna
Athletic Bilbao v Mallorca
Valladolid v Barcelona
Atlético Madrid v Osasuna
Valencia v Getafe
Almeria v Villarreal

Villarreal 2 Athletic Bilbao 0

Second-half goals from Santi Cazorla and Matias Fernandez gave Villarreal a deserved 2-0 win at home to Athletic Bilbao.

Following a tight first half, Villarreal stepped up the pace after the break and took the lead through Spain winger Cazorla with just over 20 minutes left.

The home side missed several good chances to seal it in the latter stages against an Athletic side reduced to 10 men following the dismissal of midfielder Mikael Susaeta.

But Fernandez finally struck the clincher in added time to round off an important victory which keeps Villarreal in fourth place.

Manuel Pellegrini's side finished second last term but have little hope of catching Barcelona or Real Madrid this season.

Finishing fourth and qualifying for the Champions League will be deemed a success for the `Yellow Submarine', who face Arsenal in the quarter-finals of this season's competition.

The two sides met in the semi-finals in 2006, the Gunners winning before losing to Barcelona in the final.

Villarreal first had to concentrate on the Primera Liga however, and with Atletico Madrid and Malaga just two points behind them at the start of the day, a win was crucial.

But Athletic - who have been somewhat distracted themselves in recent times following their excellent run in the Copa del Rey, in which they will meet Barcelona in the final - proved difficult to break down in an even first half.

Nihat Kahveci tested Gorka Iraizoz with a low shot early on and Igor Gabilondo then tried his luck from long distance at the other end but Diego Lopez gathered comfortably.

Neither side really looked likely to break the deadlock in the first 45 minutes, but Villarreal improved drastically after the break.

Gabilondo almost flicked the ball into his own net a minute after the restart as Villarreal pressured.

And Giuseppe blasted over the bar with only Iraizoz to beat seven minutes later.

Nihat then fired into the side netting as the hosts continued to dominate and it was no surprise when they finally took the lead after 68 minutes.

Rossi took the ball forward and set up Cazorla, who beat Iraizoz with a rasping effort from just inside the box.

Rossi and Joseba Llorente both missed good chances to add a second goal but there was no way back for Athletic, especially after Susaeta received his marching orders following a second yellow card.

Rossi missed another good chance to seal it with five minutes left, but Fernandez popped up to score the second in added time.

The Chile forward left two Athletic defenders in his wake, side-stepped another and clinically slotted past an exposed Iraizoz to wrap up a deserved victory for the home side.

Athletic are now in the bottom half, having lost to the top four sides - Barcelona, Real Madrid, Sevilla and Villarreal - in their last four league games.

Sevilla FC 4 Valladolid 1

Fredi Kanoute struck a brilliant hat-trick as Champions League-chasing Sevilla convincingly brushed aside giantkillers Real Valladolid 4-1 on Saturday night.

Kanoute produced two clinical finishes to give Sevilla a 2-1 half-time lead before powering home a header midway through the second period to complete his treble and seal a deserved triumph for Manolo Jimenez's in-form side.

The other half of Sevilla's prolific strikeforce, Luis Fabiano, added his side's other goal just after half-time, taking the joint tally between him and Kanoute to nine goals in the last four games.

The victory means Sevilla have now picked up 16 points out of a possible 18 since losing at home to arch rivals Real Betis at the start of last month, and keeps them on course for a top-three finish at the end of the campaign.

Ninth-placed Valladolid had boasted an impressive list of scalps heading into the game, beating six of the current top eight already this season - including a 3-2 home win over Sevilla where they battled back from 2-0 down.

And Jose Luis Mendilibar's side again showed their fighting qualities after falling behind just eight minutes into this match.

Valladolid had threatened first when Fabian Canobbio's curling free-kick was parried away by Andres Palop but it was Sevilla who drew first blood when Ndri Romaric fed the ball into Kanoute, who took one touch with his left foot before drilling a low right-footed shot across visiting goalkeeper Justo Villar from the edge of the box.

Sevilla threw away that good start 14 minutes later though when some dismal defending allowed Valladolid to draw level through Henok Goitom.

Goitom was left totally unmarked on the edge of the six-yard box and he made Sevilla pay as he comfortably headed home Canobbio's free-kick from the right.

Sevilla need not have worried too much however, as even though Valladolid had enjoyed a helping hand from the home side's defence, it was a different story at the other end of the pitch as Kanoute again showed his striking quality three minutes before the break to put Sevilla back in front.

Jesus Navas broke down the right before pulling a cross back to the Mali international, who volleyed home a fine effort from 12 yards out.

Sevilla were just about deserving of their half-time lead, but they will have been wary about Valladolid producing a similar purple patch as they did in the previous meeting when Mendilibar's side scored three times in 20 minutes either side of the break.

It was Sevilla who would make the next crucial breakthrough though as Fabiano broke the Valladolid offside trap to make it 3-1 in the 56th minute.

Adriano's pinpoint throughball sent his fellow Brazilian through on goal and the forward coolly rounded Villar before slotting into an empty net as Inaki Bea tried in vain to get back and block the shot.

Five minutes later Fabiano should have added his second but he sent a downward header against the foot of the post with the goal gaping.

Fabiano had then been substituted by the time his fellow forward Kanoute showed him how to do it in the 71st minute as the former Tottenham striker completed his hat-trick.

Fernando Navarro sent in a cross from the left and Kanoute left Villar with no chance to save as he slammed home a thumping header from 10 yards out to round off the scoring and take his tally to 15 for the season.

SPAIN

Barcelona Want A Frontline Of Ribery, Villa & Messi

Barcelona want to sign Franck Ribery and David Villa in the summer to make a dream trio up-front alongside Lionel Messi - and there are ten reasons why it could happen, according to a report.

The Blaugrana are looking to replenish their squad at the end of the current campaign and have been strongly linked with both the Frenchman and the Valencia forward.

El Mundo Deportivo believe that there are very good reasons why both transfers could, and should, be pushed through if both Samuel Eto'o and Thierry Henry are sold, as expected.

"Villa is among the best goalscorers in the world, while Ribery's versatility has made him a favourite of Guardiola," the report begins.

"The Valencia striker has revelled in the pressure at Mestalla and scored goals at every level while keeping Raul out of the Spain squad.

"Ribery is now the leader of the French team and the best player at Bayern.

"Both players are at an ideal age, with Villa being 27 and Ribery 26."

Financial considerations are also covered, with both the would-be selling cubs, Bayern and Valencia, and the players concerned claimed to be likely beneficiaries of the pair's transfer to Barcelona.

"Valencia are going through an economic crisis and may have to sell their stars for a reduced price, among them Villa. While Bayern have begun to consider letting Ribery go and could accept a bid of €30m," El Mundo Deportivo continues.

"Ribery is paid around €3.75m-per-year at Bayern, while Villa earns €3m at Valencia, and both would see those figures rise considerably at Camp Nou.

"The team that won the league and the Champions League in 2006 has not been properly renewed and the club has paid for that."

Warding off interest from England and from Real Madrid is also a priority if Barcelona are to remain at the forefront of the European game.

"The big money is in the Premier League, whether it be with the nouveau riche of Manchester City or the old guard of Manchester United. One is considering Villa while the other is watching Ribery," the report states.

"Los Blancos have their presidential elections this summer and that could see Florentino Perez return. But in a recession, the best players are not always available and he will have to be cautious."

Joan Laporta has to stand down as president at the end of next season and is keen to round of his spell at the helm in style.

"The Barcelona president will want to go into his last season as president with a great team and it could be that they play in the final of the Champions League which is set to be held in the Bernabeu," the story continues.

Neither Ribery nor Villa have hidden their admiration for Barcelona and that has also appeared to encourage both the club and the media.

"Ribery has made it clear he would like to join Barça, while Villa's agent, Jose Luis Tamargo, has stated that his client would score plenty of goals in Camp Nou and would make an incredible partner for Messi," the report concludes.

David Villa (pictured) and Franck Ribery may join Lionel Messi in a great attacking force at Barcelona

Atletico Madrid Coy Over Deco Link

Brazilian-born Deco has been linked with an exit from Stamford Bridge after failing to impress for the Blues since his €10 million move from Barcelona last summer.

According to the Daily Mail, Atletico Madrid are one of the sides monitoring Deco's situation and pondering a move for the 31-year-old.

However, Cerezo insists that the club have not begun preparations for the next season.

"We are not thinking about signings yet," he told radio station TSF. "Deco is an interesting player but it's still too soon to address such matters."

Quizzed on whether Deco's alleged availability would help his move to the Vicente Calderon, Cerezo responded, "I do not know. We are focused on the league."

Portuguese midfielder Deco has been linked with a move to Athletico Madrid

Raul Will Want To Coach Atletico Madrid Or Real Madrid One Day - Cerezo

Enrique Cerezo has declared he believes Raul will want to coach either Atletico Madrid or Real Madrid one day.

Speaking to Radio Nacional de Espana he said that he would like Abel Resino to continue for a long time, but that in football success is measured by results.

"Coaches have, as professionals, a problem, and that is the fact that they live on their wins. Our intention is for Abel to continue with us for a year, five or six, or life, but unfortunately it successes determine how long you will stay for," he mused.

"Everybody wants to be a coach...Someday Raul will want to be coach of either Real Madrid or Atletico Madrid, since he shared his youth between the two teams."

As far as Resino goes, Cerezo declared that he has "many advantages: firstly, he is Atletico, secondly, that he is a former player, and third, that we think he is doing very well".

The president also spoke about Atletico Madrid's prize possession, Sergio Aguero, and admitted if the player wanted to leave, and someone offered the asking price, he could do nothing to stop it.

"He has a clause that I do not know how much it is, and if a club comes and offers that amount, and he agrees, we cannot do anything," he explained.

"Kun is a player who is 20 years old, has come to play for Atletico, is delighted and happy to be with Atletico, and right now nothing else matters."

BUNDES LIGA

GERMANY

BUNDES LIGA

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

VfB Stuttgart	2	Hertha Berlin	0
Energie Cottbus	0	FC Cologne	2
TSG Hoffenheim	2	Hannover 96	2

		P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1	Hertha Berlin	25	15	4	6	39	29	49
2	VfL Wolfsburg	25	14	6	5	53	31	48
3	Bayern Munich	25	14	6	5	53	31	48
4	Hamburg SV	24	14	3	7	37	35	45
5	TSG Hoffenheim	25	12	8	5	52	34	44
6	VfB Stuttgart	25	12	6	7	44	36	42
7	Bayer Leverkusen	25	11	5	9	46	33	38
8	Schalke 04	24	10	7	7	33	25	37
9	Borussia Dortmund	25	8	13	4	37	31	37
10	Werder Bremen	25	8	8	9	46	35	32
11	FC Cologne	25	9	5	11	29	35	32
12	Eintracht Frankfurt	25	6	8	11	30	39	26
13	Hannover 96	25	6	8	11	35	52	26
14	VfL Bochum	25	5	10	10	29	40	25
15	Arminia Bielefeld	25	4	12	9	21	36	24
16	Monchengladbach	25	6	4	15	32	47	22
17	Energie Cottbus	25	5	5	15	21	44	20
18	Karlsruhe	25	5	2	18	18	42	17

Bayern Munich 1 Karlsruhe 0

Jose Ernesto Sosa's first-half strike was enough as Bayern Munich held on to beat Karlsruhe and move within one point of Bundesliga leaders Hertha Berlin.

While Berlin lost at Stuttgart to remain on 49 points, Sosa's goal in the 34th minute gave Bayern their third straight victory to move to 48 points.

Bayern were down to just one striker - Lukas Podolski - without Luca Toni, Miroslav Klose and recently departed Landon Donovan.

Head coach Jurgen Klinsmann started Sosa in the attacking midfield position and Bayern had a number of good chances early on.

Bastian Schweinsteiger's eight-yard shot after five minutes was stopped by defender Dino Drpic's leg.

And Franck Ribery fed Schweinsteiger five minutes later, the Germany international's lofted shot got beating Karlsruhe keeper Markus Miller but striking the lower half of the crossbar.

Bayern took the lead however thanks to a fine pass from Ribery in the 34th minute.

The Frenchman worked past four Karlsruhe defenders and sent a flat cross towards the far right corner where Sosa struck first time past Miller from six yards.

Bayern had cause to be thankful when Ribery was not sent off, but only saw yellow two minutes after the break for shoving Andreas Gorlitz.

The visitors grew stronger and Bayern keeper Michael Rensing needed two fine saves against Antonio da Silva in the 53rd and 57th minutes.

Miller made an excellent save against Martin Demichelis just after the hour mark. But he was helpless against Daniel van Buyten's hammer free kick, which went just inches off target with five minutes left.

The visitors pushed forward with everything they had looking for the equaliser.

Ze Roberto headed away Michael Mutzel's shot at the goalline a minute into injury time. The ball went directly to Lars Stindl, who headed over the bar from two yards.

Bayern and Wolfsburg are now level in second place, while last-placed Karlsruhe's fifth straight defeat means they are seven points from safety.

Bayer Leverkusen 1 Eintracht Frankfurt 1

Bayer Leverkusen and Eintracht Frankfurt shared the spoils today but a point will have done little for either side's ambitions.

Alexander Meier fired Frankfurt into the lead in the 16th minute but Michal Kadlec levelled five minutes before the interval.

The result sees the hosts remain six points off fifth-placed Hoffenheim and a place in the Europa League, while Frankfurt are four points clear of the relegation zone.

The visitors took the lead in the 16th minute when Martin Fenin raced down the left wing before crossing in towards Meier in the six-yard box to scramble it in thanks in part to a deflection by Leverkusen defender Lukas Sinkiewicz.

Frankfurt looked set to go in at half-time in front but Tranquillo Barnetta's corner fell to Kadlec following a goalmouth scramble and the Czech Republic defender calmly slotted it home from close range.

Leverkusen almost took the lead seconds later as a breakdown in communication between Frankfurt goalkeeper Markus Proll and Marco Russ saw the ball fall to Stefan Kiessling but his attempted lob from the edge of the area hit the crossbar.

Frankfurt could have restored their advantage shortly before the hour mark but Umit Korkmaz's 30-yard free-kick was well saved by Rene Adler.

Proll did even better at the other end four minutes from time as a cross from Kadlec left Angelos Charisteas one-on-one with the goalkeeper who was quick off his line to smother the Leverkusen striker's shot.

Frankfurt almost snatched the three points right at the death when Adler spilled Caio's free-kick but Habib Bellaid's 10-yard shot scraped past the left hand post.

Arminia Bielefeld 0 VfL Wolfsburg 3

Wolfsburg clinched their seventh straight league victory at the expense of Arminia Bielefeld this afternoon to move within one point of Bundesliga leaders Hertha Berlin.

Christian Gentner opened the scoring in the 19th minute before goals from Grafite (57) and Ashkan Dejagah (87) put the result beyond doubt in the second half.

The Wolves were in full control throughout the 90 minutes, making Bielefeld pay for the slightest mistake.

After a corner from the hosts, Grafite started a counter-attack on the left wing, cleverly chipping the ball into the box. Zvjezdan Misimovic let it go for Gentner, who slotted the ball home from 14 yards.

Grafite could have doubled their lead in the 33rd minute when Edin Dzeko pulled the ball back to him, but the Brazilian's shot from the edge of the box whistled inches past the left-hand post.

All the hosts could muster was a harmless shot from Artur Wichniarek, who pulled the trigger from an acute angle on the left shortly before the break.

Bielefeld wasted their best chance to equalise early in the second period. Diego Benaglio parried a 20-yarder from Daniel Halfar before bravely stopping Robert Tesche's follow-up shot from close range.

The Wolves never looked back, and when Grafite found himself with time and space deep inside the Bielefeld box following Sascha Riether's pass, he grabbed his 18th goal of the season.

Rudiger Kauf and Thorben Marx squandered two chances for the home team before Ashkan Dejagah sealed the Wolves' victory three minutes from time.

His shot from the right channel was deflected by Nico Herzig, leaving Dennis Eilhoff with no chance.

Borussia Dortmund 1 Werder Bremen 0

Alexander Frei's second-half penalty earned Borussia Dortmund a home victory over Werder Bremen which keeps alive their hopes of European football.

Frei scored the only goal of the game in the 64th minute to give Dortmund their first victory of the second half of the season.

Dortmund remain undefeated at home this season and are now in ninth place with 37 points - seven behind fifth-placed Hoffenheim and a place in the Europa League.

Bremen came into the game after beating Stuttgart 4-0 last week and advancing to the UEFA Cup quarter-finals but their difficulties in the league continued and they know that, with just 32 points, they must stop thinking about securing a Europa League spot.

The first chance of the game came after seven minutes as Frei's free-kick from 18 yards sailed just wide of the left post.

Bremen should have taken the lead in the 36th minute when Mesut Ozil's cross found Claudio Pizarro all alone in the six-yard box, but the Peruvian struck his shot over the crossbar.

Dortmund were in control of the match and had the run of play for the rest of the first half and the early stages of the second.

There were appeals for a penalty when Sebastian Prodl appeared to take down Nelson Valdez in the area on the hour mark but the referee waved play on.

However, Valdez was awarded his penalty three minutes later when he was felled by Sebastian Boenisch and Frei stepped up to the spot to blast his shot into the bottom-left corner past Tim Wiese.

Valdez missed a chance to double the lead with 17 minutes to play, heading a Tamas Hajnal cross wide of the right upright from close range.

And Wiese stopped two chances two minutes later from Hajnal and Florian Kringe.

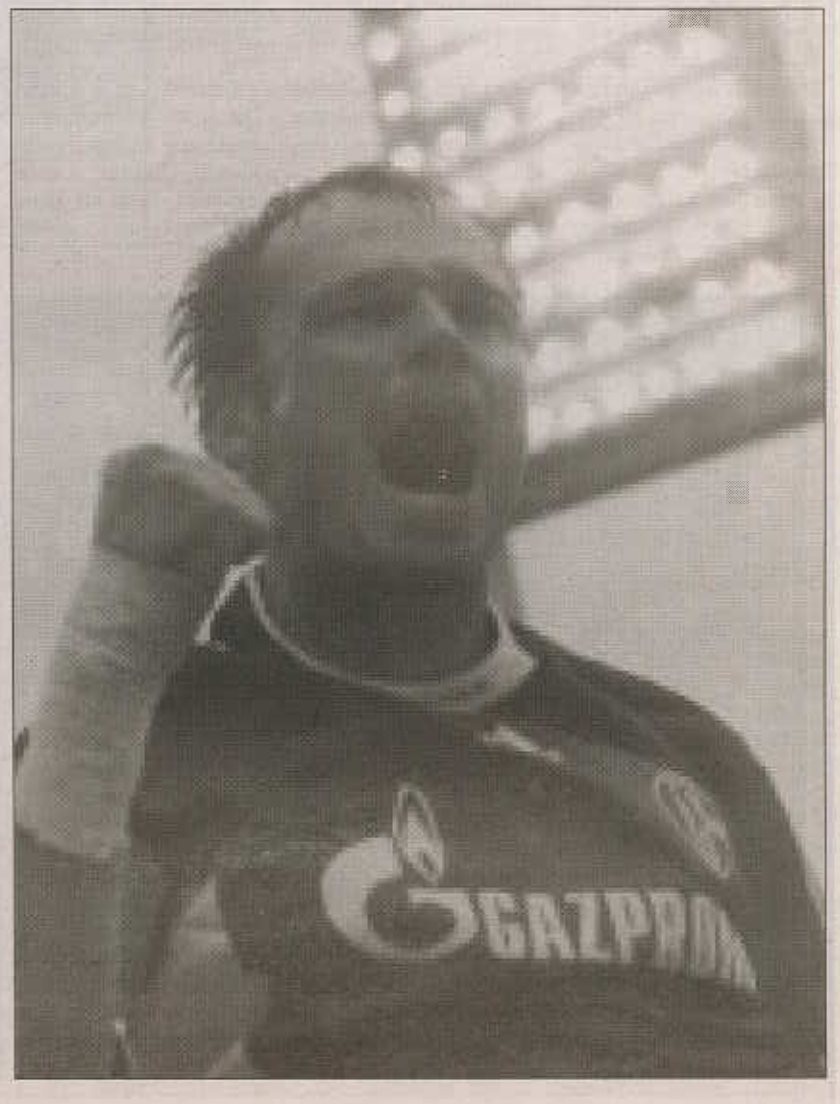
Bremen had one final opportunity to equalise with five minutes left but Pizarro could not beat Dortmund keeper Roman Weidenfeller.

Next Fixtures:

Friday, April 3
Arminia Bielefeld v Schalke 04

Saturday, April 4
Hertha Berlin v Borussia Dortmund
Hamburg SV v TSG Hoffenheim
VfL Wolfsburg v Bayern Munich
VfL Bochum v VfB Stuttgart
Eintracht Frankfurt v Energie Cottbus

Sunday, April 5
Werder Bremen v Hannover 96
Karlsruhe v Borussia Monchengladbach
FC Cologne v Bayer Leverkusen



HOLLAND

eredivisie

Next Fixtures:

Friday, April 3
NEC Nijmegen v Twente

Saturday, April 4
FC Utrecht v FC Groningen
SC Heracles Almelo v Heerenveen
AZ Alkmaar v ADO Den Haag
Sparta Rotterdam v PSV Eindhoven

Sunday, April 5
Roda JC Kerkrade v Ajax Amsterdam
FC Volendam v Feyenoord
Willem II Tilburg v NAC Breda
Vitesse Arnhem v De Graafschap

NEC Nijmegen 0 Willem II Tilburg 0

NEC Nijmegen failed to move up into the final Europa League play-off berth after being held goalless by Willem II this evening.

Mario Been had fined himself and his team after their 3-0 defeat to ADO Den Haag in their last game but the future Feyenoord coach failed to get the response he would have hoped for as NEC stayed ninth, one place beneath the European play-off zone.

NEC made most of the first-half running and Dennis Rommedahl drew a smart save from Willem II goalkeeper Maikel Aerts in the fifth minute after good combination play from Lasse Schone and Saidi Ntibazonkiza.

The Burundi forward then linked up with Lorenzo Davids midway through the half, and the latter's left-foot shot flew past Aerts' right-hand post.

Frank Demouge almost gave the visitors the lead two minutes later when he chested down a ball from Arjan Swinkels and volleyed goalwards, but NEC goalkeeper Gabor Babos brilliantly tipped it over the crossbar.

Seconds later Bas Sibum fired a shot wide for NEC and Ntibazonkiza then went close just before the half-hour mark with a volley following a corner from Youssef El Akchaoui.

Ramon Zomer got on the end of another El Akchaoui corner but his sweet shot rose over the bar and with three minutes of the half remaining Ntibazonkiza's speculative 30-yard shot was just off-target.

Mohamed Messoudi almost punished NEC for their wastefulness when his 62nd-minute effort was just too high, before Rommedahl came the closest of anybody to scoring after 65 minutes.

The former PSV Eindhoven man worked an opening with Davids and his drive from 16 yards rattled the right-hand post.

NEC just could not score and Ntibazonkiza teed up Schone for a chance with seven minutes to go which he headed over the bar.

Ibrahim Kargbo then cleared a Davids effort on the goal-line with four minutes to go.

The hosts hit the woodwork once more in injury time as Sibum's 25-yard shot clipped the crossbar on its way over, but their failure to take any of a host of chances met with disapproval from the home fans, who jeered the team off the pitch.

PSV Eindhoven 2 Vitesse Arnhem 0

PSV Eindhoven boosted their hopes of clinching a Europa League berth with a comfortable victory over Vitesse Arnhem.

Ibrahim Afellay headed PSV in front in the 23rd minute and Ola Toivonen doubled their lead in the 70th minute.

The result sees PSV close the gap to fourth-placed Heerenveen - who lost last night - to five points, while Vitesse remain 11th ahead of the rest of the weekend's fixtures.

PSV started brightly and should have taken the lead in the 15th minute as Balazs Dzsudzsak saw his effort from just outside the six yard box brush the outside of the left post.

Dzsudzsak went even closer seconds later when Vitesse goalkeeper Piet Velthuizen did well to prevent his powerful 35-yard screamer from hitting the back of the net.

The hosts broke the deadlock six minutes later when Otman Bakkal floated in a cross to the far post where Afellay headed it into the arms of Velthuizen from six yards only for the Vitesse goalkeeper to fall back over the line with the ball.

Lasse Nilsson almost equalised three minutes before the break as he picked up the ball in his own half and made a fantastic run to the edge of the PSV penalty area only to see his shot fly inches wide of the left upright.

Toivonen should have doubled PSV's lead two minutes into the second half as his 20-yard shot beat Velthuizen but crashed off the post.

The Sweden striker did score his team's second in the 70th minute when he fired the ball across the Vitesse goalkeeper and into the top left corner from the edge of the six-yard box.

Sparta Rotterdam 1 SC Heracles Almelo 0

Sparta Rotterdam ended their run of four straight defeats with a victory over nine-man Heracles Almelo.

DUTCH EREDIVISIE

		P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1	AZ Alkmaar	27	22	3	2	56	14	69
2	Twente Enschede	27	17	7	3	51	24	58
3	Ajax Amsterdam	27	17	4	6	58	29	55
4	Heerenveen	28	16	6	6	59	48	54
5	PSV Eindhoven	28	14	7	7	55	30	49
6	FC Groningen	27	13	4	10	46	31	43
7	NAC Breda	27	12	6	9	41	40	42
8	FC Utrecht	27	10	8	9	35	31	38
9	NEC Nijmegen	28	9	10	9	33	31	37
10	Feyenoord Rotterdam	27	9	7	11	40	36	34
11	Vitesse Arnhem	28	7	9	12	28	41	30
12	Willem II Tilburg	28	8	5	15	29	45	29
13	ADO Den Haag	27	7	6	14	29	41	27
14	SC Heracles Almelo	28	6	9	13	28	43	27
15	Sparta Rotterdam	28	7	6	15	39	59	27
16	De Graafschap	28	6	5	17	19	53	23
17	Roda JC Kerkrade	27	5	7	15	28	47	22
18	FC Volendam	27	5	5	17	30	61	20

Last weekend's 5-1 hammering against Heerenveen saw Sparta slip to 15th, just four points off the foot of the table.

But Edouard Duplan's goal early in the second half was enough for the home side to take a vital three points and ease their relegation fears.

Heracles had the first chance of a poor opening period, Paddy John firing in a shot from 25 yards which was saved by Cassio Ramos after eight minutes.

It took until the 31st minute for Sparta to seriously threaten, Kevin Strootman's corner met with a powerful header by Karim Touzani but goalkeeper Martin Pieckenhagen made a good save.

Pieckenhagen made an even better save five minute before the interval, turning Arne Slot's header round the post from Strootman's free-kick.

Sparta's task was made easier two minutes after the interval when Mark Looms was sent off for a second bookable offence, and they quickly made their numerical advantage count.

Krisztian Vermes' cross landed at the feet of Duplan and he smashed the ball into the net to break the deadlock.

Heracles did threaten to snatch a point but failed to make the most of an excellent cross from John a minute from the end, and they ended the game with nine men when Birger Maertens was dismissed for two bookable offences deep in injury time.

FRANCE

FRENCH LIGUE 1

		P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1	Marseille	29	15	10	4	45	26	55
2	Bordeaux	29	15	8	6	47	30	53
3	Lyon	28	15	8	5	36	21	53
4	Lille	29	14	10	5	41	29	52
5	Paris Saint-Germain	28	16	4	8	40	28	52
6	Toulouse	28	13	10	5	33	20	49
7	Stade Rennes	29	11	15	3	32	19	48
8	Nice	29	11	8	10	33	32	41
9	AJ Auxerre	29	10	7	12	25	27	37
10	AS Monaco	29	9	9	11	34	35	36
11	Grenoble	29	8	11	10	19	26	35
12	Valenciennes	29	7	12	10	26	29	33
13	Lorient	28	7	11	10	31	32	32
14	Le Mans	29	8	8	13	33	41	32
15	AS Nancy Lorraine	29	7	9	13	27	38	30
16	Nantes	29	7	9	13	26	40	30
17	Sochaux	28	6	11	11	30	36	29
18	St Etienne	28	8	5	15	26	40	29
19	Caen	29	5	12	12	32	40	27
20	Le Havre AC	29	5	3	21	23	58	18

Nice 2
Caen 2

Veteran Nice midfielder Olivier Echouafni headed an equaliser a minute from full-time to deny 10-man Caen their first league win in 14 outings at the Municipal du Ray.

A horrendous run of form has seen Caen go without a win in Ligue 1 since late November and leave them languishing second from bottom in the table.

It looked like they would finally bring that run to an end when two goals in nine second-half minutes - a Vincent Hognon own goal and Nicolas Seube's strike - shot them ahead after going behind to Loic Remy's sixth-minute opener.

But Caen's task was complicated when they were forced to defend the last seven minutes without Gregory Leca, who was sent off for a second bookable offence, and it proved beyond them as the 36-year-old Echouafni headed in with just a minute to go.

Caen goalkeeper Alexis Thebaux had already reacted well to keep out a deflected Mahamane Traore shot before the hosts went ahead through Remy with six minutes on the clock.

Chaouki Ben Saada made a surging run down the left flank before delivering a cross to the edge of the area where Remy produced a low right-footed shot that beat Thebaux.

The baux was easily the busier of the two goalkeepers and scrambled to punch clear a stinging shot from Ben Saada, although it was David Ospina at the other end who produced the best saves of the half when he twice denied Julien Toudic with a couple of reflex stops from close range.

Caen did find an equaliser after 65 minutes when Hognon shinned the ball into his own net under pressure from Sambou Yatabar.

Pablo Barzola had created the danger when he dribbled into space down the right before fizzing in a cross that Hognon failed to deal with.

Nine minutes later Caen were ahead following another defensive lapse.

A poor clearance from Onyekachi Apam allowed Seube the chance to swoop and he took his chance by firing in a right-footed shot from 14 yards to put Caen on the brink of a much-needed win.

But after Leca was dismissed there was an air of inevitability about the arrival of an equaliser and it duly arrived a minute from the end when David Hellebuyck's free-kick into the area found Echouafni to head home.

Lille 2
Grenoble 1

Lille withstood a stoppage-time onslaught from Grenoble to collect all three points which leaves them very much in the Ligue 1 title race.

The hosts seemed to be cruising to victory thanks to first-half goals from Michel Bastos and Robert Vittek before Sandy Paillot's last-gasp goal set up a frantic final five minutes.

Lille move up to fourth in the table ahead of the rest of the weekend's fixtures while Grenoble slip to 11th, just six points off the relegation zone after their first defeat in seven games.

The hosts took the lead in the 11th minute when Daniel Moreira fouled Franck Beria and Bastos stepped up to convert the resulting penalty. Grenoble goalkeeper Gregory Wimbee dived the right way but was beaten by the power of the spot-kick.

They nearly doubled their lead in the 22nd minute but Wimbee did well to stop Aurlien Chedjou's strike.

Grenoble should have equalised seconds later but Alaixys Romao saw his effort from the edge of the area fly narrowly past the left upright.

Lille thought they had increased their advantage shortly before the half-hour mark as Wimbee punched Eden Hazard's effort clear but only as far as Florent Balmont who saw his shot scrambled clear by the Grenoble defence.

The hosts did go in at half-time two goals to the good as five minutes before the break Hazard released Bastos with a long ball and the Brazilian slotted the ball to Vittek who tapped it into the back of the net.

Lille should have put the game beyond reach 10 minutes after the interval as Bastos jinked his way past several Grenoble players before beating Wimbee only to see his effort cleared by a defender's last-ditch clearance.

Bastos carved out another chance four minutes from time as he picked out Hazard who volleyed inches over the bar.

Grenoble pulled one back in the last minute as Nassim Akrour's volley was cleared only as far as Bostjan Cesar who in turn saw his own shot parried. However, it was a case of third time lucky for the visitors as Paillot lashed in the rebound.

They hurled everything at Lille to find the equaliser but the hosts clung on for a tense five minutes of stoppage time.

Le Havre AC 0
Bordeaux 3

Bordeaux moved to the top of the Ligue 1 standings tonight courtesy of a comfortable victory at basement boys Le Havre.

Yoann Gourcuff opened the scoring after 12 minutes and Souleymane Diawara added a second 13 minutes into the second half before Wendel made the result absolutely safe two minutes from time.

The triumph puts Laurent Blanc's team above champions Lyon, who host Sochaux tomorrow, on goal difference.

It could all have been different had the hosts taken advantage of the first noteworthy opportunity of the match, but Abasse Ba's looping header from Stephane Noro's 10th-minute corner drifted over the bar.

Two minutes later, Gourcuff controlled a Jussie cross from the right and fired a fine left-footed shot past Christophe Revault to break the deadlock at the other end.

France international Gourcuff, on loan from AC Milan, turned provider midway through the first half, superbly releasing Marouane Chamakh but Damien Tixier whipped the ball away from him at the last moment.

Amadou Alassane had a chance to equalise for Le Havre seven minutes before half-time when he pounced on a slack ball from Diawara and closed in on visiting goalkeeper Ulrich Rame, but he ran out of room before he could get his shot away.

Noro again had sight of goal shortly after the break when Noro's shot brushed the woodwork on its way out and then Hassane Alla saw an effort blocked by Mathieu Valverde - a replacement for Rame, who suffered a left knee injury.

Just before the hour mark, Diawara produced a powerful header from Wendel's corner to make it 2-0.

Le Havre continued to fight, with Valverde forced to punch clear to avert a Noro free-kick midway through the second period.

But Wendel put the gloss on the result towards the end, firing a left-footed free-kick into the net via the left-hand post.

Stade Rennes ..0
Valenciennes ..0

Rennes and Valenciennes battled out a goalless draw tonight in an ill-tempered encounter which saw both teams reduced to 10 men.

Rennes midfielder Kader Mangane saw red after 25 minutes and the visitors surrendered their man advantage just before the hour mark when Carlos Sanchez was also dismissed.

The result sees the hosts remain seventh while Valenciennes, for whom a three-month unbeaten league run continues, move up a place to 12th.

VA, without star striker Jean-Claude Darcheville who picked up a calf injury last weekend, mustered the first chance of the match in the 12th minute.

Rudy Mater beat Carlos Bocanegra on the right and crossed for Filip Sebo, whose powerful header was blocked by home goalkeeper Nicolas Douchez.

The home team's chances suffered a blow when Mangane received his marching orders midway through the opening period for a dangerous tackle from behind on Jonathan Lacourt, who left the pitch on a stretcher.

Despite their numerical disadvantage, Rennes almost broke the deadlock in the 34th minute when Douchez's long ball - via the head of Olivier Thomert - found Jimmy Briand, whose left-footed volley was punched clear by Nicolas Penneteau.

Douchez was forced into a decent save at the other end three minutes later to deny Gregory Pujol after he had been played in by Gael Danic.

Rennes came within a whisker of going ahead seven minutes after the interval, Fabien Lemoine picking up possession 20 yards out and advancing before firing in a shot which brushed the left-hand upright on its way wide.

It was then Sanchez's turn to take an early bath following a nasty tackle on Stephane MBia.

The home side continued to push for the breakthrough, Jerome Leroy releasing Thomert only for Penneteau to block his volley in the 64th minute.

Penneteau again had to be alert nine minutes from time to deny Lemoine as VA held on for a point.

AJ Auxerre 2
Le Mans 0

Auxerre took control of this Ligue 1 game with two goals in the first 19 minutes - and comfortably held on for the three points.

The home side took the lead in the eighth minute after Benoit Pedretti had freed Ireneusz Jelen down the left.

The striker advanced and beat defender Gregory Cerdan, before lobbing the ball over goalkeeper Yohan Pel.

Le Mans had a chance to equalise three minutes later after Ivorian striker Gervinho had set up Paulo Andr - but the Brazilian defender's powerful 18-yard shot struck the crossbar.

The visitors were made to pay eight minutes later when Dariusz Dudka doubled the advantage, becoming the second Pole on target for the home side tonight.

Le Mans' Ibrahima Camara lost possession and Dudka capitalised, shooting low and powerfully into the net.

Kamel Chafni went close to a third in the 33rd minute when Camara again conceded possession cheaply, but the Moroccan midfielder's right-footed shot brushed the angle of post and crossbar.

The visitors almost gave themselves a lifeline nine minutes before the interval - but Auxerre goalkeeper Olivier Sorin blocked Camara's shot.

Auxerre started the second half strongly and in the 50th minute Thomas Kahlenberg crossed from the right and goalkeeper Yohann Pel watched gratefully as defender Antonio Geder got back to clear the danger.

However, the visitors wasted another chance to get themselves back in the game midway through the second half when Marcelo Estigarribia's free-kick was too close to Sorin.

And it was the home side who finished on top, creating the final chance of note in the contest.

With four minutes remaining Kahlenberg advanced before releasing former Sochaux favourite Pedretti. The 28-year-old midfielder took his time and picked his spot - but Pel got down well and produced a good save.

Marseille 2
Nantes 0

A sublime Marseille performance saw them go top of the Ligue 1 table, temporarily at least, with a comfortable victory over Nantes.

OM stepped up a gear in the second half and Renato Civelli broke the deadlock in the 55th minute before Brandao doubled their lead four minutes later.

They are now two points clear at the top of the standings ahead of Lyon's match tomorrow, while Nantes remain a point clear of the relegation zone and could find themselves sucked into the bottom three by the end of the weekend.

Marseille almost got off to the perfect start but Bakari Kone's 20-yard shot flew inches over the top of the bar.

Nantes did not have a sight on goal until the 25th minute and although Guiranne N'daw's 25-yard shot went well wide at least it offered their fans a glimmer of hope.

The hosts should have taken the lead six minutes from half-time as Mathieu Valbuena picked out Mamadou Niang but he hit the side-netting from 12 yards out.

Marseille stepped up a gear after the break and the introduction of Boudwijn Zenden - who had been rested initially after suffering cramp against Ajax - had an immediate effect.

They had a great chance seconds after the restart as Nantes goalkeeper Jerome Alonzo was forced into a fantastic save to keep out Brandao's excellent volley.

It was a sign of what was to come as the deadlock was broken 10 minutes into the second half when Zenden picked out Civelli who sent a low shot fizzing into the bottom left corner from 12 yards.

Zenden was also involved in OM's second four minutes later as the Nantes defence failed to deal with his shot properly and the ball pinged around the penalty area before falling to Brandao who headed it home from close range.

Nantes continued to fight but never looked like scoring and Marseille could have even extended their advantage.

Next Fixtures:

Saturday, April 4

Sochaux v Stade Rennes
Nantes v Lille
Grenoble v Lorient
Valenciennes v AJ Auxerre
Caen v Toulouse
Paris Saint-Germain v Nice
Bordeaux v AS Nancy
Le Mans v Lyon
St Etienne v Marseille
AS Monaco v Le Havre AC

GREECE

Diogo double saves Olympiakos in Tripoli

A comeback brace from Brazilian striker Diogo saw Olympiakos and Asteras Tripolis play to a 2-2 score-line in Tripoli after the hosts had gone ahead with a double from Lucio Filomeno.

The defending Greek Cup Champions were rescued by their Brazilian ace, and now take a slim aggregate lead, on away goals, to the Giorgos Karaiskakis Stadium for the second leg.

Having thrashed Iraklis 5-0 on the weekend, Olympiakos had returned to their stunning form after a somewhat gloomy end to February and an uneasy start to March.

Meanwhile, Asteras Tripolis were likely ecstatic thanks to the inclusion of Mauro Milano, after the young Argentine returned to the line-up since limping off the Karaiskaki pitch when the two sides met for a Super League encounter back in August.

While Olympiakos' offense created many chances in their weekend rout, the first twenty minutes were dominated by an Asteras side fuelled by the home crowd.

The Arcadian outfit had its first chance on nine minutes as Jaoud Zairi attempted to give Asteras an early lead with a hard shot aimed towards Olympiakos shot-stopper Antonis Nikopolidis; however, the effort did little to test the former Greece international 'keeper.

Not long after Asteras returned with another chance to net a breakthrough as Adrian Bastia connected with Flavio, but the latter flashed his effort just wide of Nikopolidis' goal.

Horacio Cardozo was the next to try for Asteras, but again Nikopolidis was left untested thanks to another inaccurate effort from the hosts.

Still pushing forward, Asteras pinned their hopes of drawing first blood on striker Lucio Filomeno, who missed out on beating Nikopolidis by slim fractions with a merely off-target header posing no threat to the Olympiakos custodian.

Finally, Olympiakos showed signs of content in the attacking third but Christos Patsatzoglou was way off with his twenty-second minute effort.

In a likewise fashion, the Argentine duo of Fernando Belluschi and Sebastian Leto combined only to see the on-loan Leto fired wide of Giorgos Abaris' net.

With the arrival of the half-hour mark, a dose of brilliance made leeway for a goal for the hosts. A tough of skill and patience from Zairi allowed the Moroccan to find an unmarked Filomeno inside the Olympiakos box, who swiftly netted a well-placed header past Nikopolidis.

It took only five more minutes for Asteras to increase their advantage, and once again it was Filomeno heading home a tally for the Tripoli crowd to cheer. A free-kick from Flavio reached a poorly marked Filomeno and the Argentine striker cheekily made it 2-0 with a header squeezing just inside the upright.

Now urged to claw their way back into the game, Olympiakos searched for a goal of their own, and were rewarded when Diogo calmly decreased the deficit. A sharp long-ranged pass from Vasilis Torosidis sent Diogo on a trek in the Asteras box, before allowing the Brazilian to chip an effort past Abaris and over the goal-line despite a back-checking Marcelao desperate to scissor-kick the ball to safety.

Changing the outlook of the game, and possibly the tie in a matter of minutes, Olympiakos nearly pulled level just before the half. Again Diogo was responsible for the effort, but this time Abaris was equal to the task as he blocked the Brazilian's effort.

Still possessing a definitive lead heading into halftime, Asteras' goal for the second frame was to withstand the pressure from the Greek Champions in hopes of maintaining their aggregate cushion ahead of the replay in Piraeus.

The pace of the second half was notably inferior compared to the start of the second half, but when action did resume accordingly it was Diogo who continued to create problems for the Asteras defense. Luciano Galletti provided a pinpoint cross off a free-kick, but Diogo failed to be as accurate with the finish as the ball soared wide of the Abaris' frame.

Another letdown came for Olympiakos just past the hour mark as a bit of miscommunication between Diogo and Belluschi saw another opportunity go wasted. Leto was the driving force behind the play as his speed down the flank allowed Diogo to find enough room in the box to release a centering pass; however, the effort went begging for a finish thanks to a flat-footed Belluschi.

Although Ernesto Valverde's side were struck with disappointed through the opening fifteen minutes of the second frame, the visitors erupted in celebration on seventy-three minutes after a series of momentous opportunities were rewarded with an equalizer.

A swift cross from Galletti found a slick Diogo, who had slipped past his marker, and with a crouched header beat Abaris to the far corner to level the score.

Retreated to the bench soon after securing his brace, Diogo was replaced by a potent Matt Derbyshire on seventy-six minutes. It took the Englishman just over five minutes to nearly strike a winner for Olympiakos, but the on-loan Blackburn Rovers starlet was denied by the woodwork.

It was a sharp run from Oscar Gonzalez that resulted in Derbyshire's spell of possession and eventual crossbar-smashing effort, but the follow up was nearly as nerve-racking for Asteras as Torosidis forced Abaris into a sharp reflex save as the Greece international rapidly pounced on the rebound.

Growing in momentum, Olympiakos' quest for a late goal to take back to Piraeus suffered a setback when Leto was dismissed from the pitch on eighty-six minutes. The Argentine winger was issued his second caution of the evening to leave Olympiakos short-handed for the dying moments of the match.

Asteras looked to take advantage of their strength in numbers when Marcelao forced the best out of Nikopolidis with his driven free-kick soon after Leto's sending-off. Lashing a hard shot towards the Olympiakos goal, Nikopolidis reacted quickly to push over the Brazilian's effort over the bar for a corner.

GREEK SUPER LEAGUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Olympiakos	26	19	5	2	43	10	62
2 Panathinaikos	26	15	8	3	45	16	53
3 PAOK Salonika	26	14	9	3	29	13	51
4 AEK Athens	26	13	11	2	35	20	50
5 Larissa	26	9	12	5	32	26	39
6 FC Xanthi	26	8	11	7	20	15	35
7 Aris Salonika	26	9	8	9	20	27	35
8 Asteras Tripoli	26	7	11	8	28	22	32
9 Panthrakikos	26	9	5	12	16	26	32
10 Panionios	26	8	6	12	30	33	30
11 Ergotelis	26	8	6	12	27	36	30
12 Levadiakos	26	8	5	13	23	29	29
13 Iraklis	26	7	8	11	18	30	29
14 Panserraikos	26	5	7	14	15	37	22
15 OFI Creto	26	4	8	14	24	40	20
16 Thrashvoulos	26	3	4	19	19	44	13

Asteras Tripolis FC 2
(Filomeno 30', 35')

Olympiakos CFP 2
(Diogo 43', 73')

Venue:
Asteras Tripolis Stadium, Tripoli, Greece

Asteras Tripolis FC: (Nikos Kostenoglou): Abaris, Flavio, Marcelao, Fytanidis (88' Esteves), Kanakoudis, Cardozo, Bastia (75' Damonte), Lazaridis, Zairi, Filomeno, Kaounos (75' Milano).

Olympiakos CFP: (Ernesto Valverde): Nikopolidis, Patsatzoglou, Galletti (79' G. Papadopoulos), Diogo (76' Derbyshire), Zewlakow, Dudu, A. Papadopoulos, Leto, Belluschi (71' Oscar), Pantos, Torosidis.

Yellow Cards: *Asteras Tripolis FC* - Cardozo 27', Fytanidis 56', Psomas 90'; *Olympiakos CFP* - Torosidis 21', Leto 56' (87').

Red Cards: *Asteras Tripolis* - none; *Olympiakos CFP* - Leto 87' (sent off after double booking).

Referee: Dimitris Kalopoulos

UEFA CUP

Round of 16

	Agg.		First leg	Second leg
Bremen	-	St Etienne	1 - 0 »	2 - 2 »
Marseille	-	Ajax	2 - 1 »	2 - 2 »
Dynamo Kyiv	-	Metalist	1 - 0 »	3 - 3 »
CSKA Moskva	-	Shakhtar	1 - 0 »	0 - 2 »
Hamburg	-	Galatasaray	1 - 1 »	3 - 2 »
PSG	-	Braga	0 - 0 »	1 - 0 »
Man. City	-	AaB	2 - 0 »	0-2 (p 4 - 3) »
Udinese	-	Zenit	2 - 0»	0 - 1 »

Bremen quick on the draw in France

Werder Bremen booked their place in the UEFA Cup quarter-finals even if, three goals up in their last-16 tie after 28 minutes, they had to withstand a spirited comeback from AS Saint-Etienne.

Thomas Schaaf's men appeared to be strolling towards Friday's draw in Nyon as they approached the half-hour mark, goals from Sebastian Prödl and Claudio Pizarro adding to Naldo's strike in last week's first leg to give them a 3-0 aggregate lead. It looked bleak for the majority at the Stade Geoffroy-Guichard, especially with home coach Alain Perrin having rested several of his first-choice team.

However, Yohan Benalouane pulled one goal back midway through the second half and substitute Sebastien Grax made it 2-2 on the night late on, though even then the hosts still needed two more.

No fears as Mears takes Marseille through

Tyrone Mears' extra-time header earned Olympique de Marseille a place in the UEFA Cup quarter-finals after AFC Ajax had cancelled out their first-leg deficit.

Defending a 2-1 lead from the first meeting last week, the Ligue 1 side went behind in Amsterdam when Eyong Enoh scored just after the half-hour mark only for Mamadou Niang to put the visitors back in front in the tie two minutes later. Miralem Sulejmani forced an extra 30 minutes with a close-range header but it merely allowed English-born right-back Mears to come to the fore, earning victory in the 110th minute. Ajax, celebrating their 109th birthday, therefore fell just short, their misery compounded when Bruno Silva was dismissed in the dying moments.

Dynamo hold off tenacious Metalist

FC Dynamo Kyiv came through a stiff examination from domestic rivals FC Metalist Kharkiv, an Andriy Berezovchuk own goal eleven minutes from time proving decisive, to become the first ever Ukrainian side to reach the UEFA Cup quarter-finals.

Dynamo led 1-0 after the first leg, but the advantage lasted just 29 minutes in Kharkov as Valentyn Sliusar opened the scoring. Jajá completed the turnaround at the start of the second half and, though Goran Sabljić edged the visitors back ahead on the away goals rule with 22 minutes remaining, Walter Anibal Acevedo swiftly made it 3-1 on the night.

It looked to be enough for a team that have been struggling of late but Berezovchuk put through his own net to make sure Dynamo's name was in the hat for the last-eight draw.

Clinical Shakhtar claim CSKA scalp

Second-half goals from Fernandinho and Luiz Adriano booked FC Shakhtar Donetsk's place in Friday's quarter-final draw, the Ukrainian side overcoming a first-leg deficit to shock 2005 UEFA Cup winners PFC CSKA Moskva.

Much of the talk before the game centred on CSKA striker Vágner Love, whose successful spot-kick in last week's 1-0 first-leg victory took him to eleven goals for the campaign.

Yet, having withstood a fair amount of pressure before the interval, Shakhtar started to replace graft with craft after the restart and within nine minutes they had their reward as Pavel Mamaev brought down Fernandinho in the penalty area.

The Brazilian duly converted from the spot, setting the scene for compatriot Luiz Adriano to seal an impressive turnaround with 20 minutes remaining.

Galatasaray undone by art of Guerrero

José Paolo Guerrero was the hero for Hamburger SV, scoring two stunning strikes as the German side came from 2-0 down to beat Galatasaray AŞ and claim their place in Friday's UEFA Cup quarter-final draw.

Already conceding a minor edge to their Turkish hosts after shipping an away goal in the 1-1 first-leg draw, Hamburg's hopes hung by a thread with 33 minutes remaining in Istanbul. Two goals in seven minutes either side of half-time from Harry Kewell, a penalty, and Milan Baroš had stacked the odds in Galatasaray's favour, but the hosts had not counted on Guerrero.

The Peruvian international reduced the arrears with a blistering long-range drive just before the hour and, three minutes later, it was all-square as he rounded off a counterattack in some style. Already leading on the away-goals rule, Ivica Olić sealed a 4-3 aggregate win for Martin Jol's men in added time with a deft chip.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

QUARTER - FINALS

	Agg.		First leg	Second leg
Villareal	-	Arsenal	7/4 »	15/4
Manchester United	-	Porto	7/4 »	15/4
Liverpool	-	Chelsea	8/4»	18/4
Barcelona	-	Bayern Munich	8/4	18/4 »

Arsenal Is A Good Draw For Villarreal - Jose Llaneza

Villarreal general manager, Jose Llaneza, has declared today that he believes the Champions League draw is good for his side.

The Spaniards will face Arsenal in the quarter-finals and will no doubt be hoping to turn the tables on them after defeat a few seasons ago.

Llaneza told Marca that he knows it will be hard but that he thinks it is still a good draw for Villarreal.

"It is a good draw...but is still cannot said to be easy. If they recover Cesc [Fabregas] it will be even more difficult," he mused.

Certainly it is a well matched tie and even though Manuel Pellegrini did not want to speak about revenge earlier today, Llaneza hinted that they do want to make up for that defeat a few years back.

"We have a chance to make up for the defeat in the semi-final and now we are going to see if we are capable of doing it," he explained.

"Even though the second leg is away and against a team as difficult as Arsenal, I believe in our chances."

Llaneza also spoke about goalkeeper Diego Lopez, who was called up to the Spanish national team today.

Even though at the time there were some who said Villarreal paid over the odds for him, the general manager believes he is paying his way.

"We knew that Diego Lopez was a great goalkeeper when we signed him and now that is being shown," he concluded.

Red Devils and Dragons await fiery rematch

UEFA Champions League holders Manchester United FC may have lost two of their three previous ties with FC Porto, but manager Sir Alex Ferguson was happy to be drawn against them in the quarter-finals.

"This is a good draw for us," said Sir Alex, whose side will kick off proceedings at Old Trafford on 7 April.

"You sometimes wonder if being at home first is a good or a bad thing, but I think in this modern-day competition there's no indication of what is better. The only thing you hope is that you don't lose a goal in the home tie."

Though Ferguson is undecided, history shows that the team hosting the opening leg in meetings between these clubs in UEFA competition has always gone on to win.

United boast Portuguese talent in Cristiano Ronaldo and Nani while Brazilian midfielder Anderson joined the Red Devils from Porto in 2007. Sir Alex thinks that will help as his side look to avenge their exit at the hands of the Dragons in the first knockout round in 2003/04 – when Porto went on to lift the trophy under José Mourinho.

"We've met Porto before and obviously we respect any Portuguese team," said Sir Alex. "We have had a huge Portuguese influence in the club, firstly with [former assistant manager] Carlos Queiroz but now with Cristiano and Nani. So we understand Portuguese football."

The draw is a daunting one for Porto, yet the Liga champions have the upper hand in previous meetings with United.

They overcame United 6-5 on aggregate in their first encounter, a 1977/78 UEFA Cup Winners' Cup second-round clash, and while they lost out to Sir Alex's men in the 1996/97 UEFA Champions League quarter-finals, that 2003/04 victory leaves them on top in statistical terms. Vítor Baía, Porto's goalkeeper five years ago and now their director of international relations, is certainly not cowed by the prospect of tackling United.

The 39-year-old said: "We are an ambitious club and we want to make the semi-final. Last time we played them it was a great performance and we will try to do the same again."

Begiristain:

Barcelona Must Be Confident Of Scoring At Bayern

The two highest scoring teams in the Champions League this season will go head to head in the quarter-finals as Barcelona lock horns with Bayern Munich and Txiki Bergiristain believes that indeed, scoring goals at the Allianz Arena will be crucial.

The technical director was disappointed that the Blaugrana will have the disadvantage of playing the second leg away from home but he is certain that it will be a tight affair in both ties.

"Bayern will head into the clash on an upward momentum, just like we are, and we are both alive in three competitions," he said in an interview with Ona FM.

"We know that their style of football will give us many problems, but we have to be faithful to our own playing philosophy, although we must also play with intelligence.

"We have often demonstrated this season that we can score on the road and we must continue to do that. We must have the confidence that we can score away from home," he added.

Txiki singled out one player from Bayern as a main threat and it was no surprise who he picked.

"Ribery is a quality player, but he wasn't the only one responsible for beating Sporting CP 12-1 [on aggregate]. It will be necessary to keep an eye on all their players," he warned.

Barcelona will entertain Malaga this weekend in the Primera Division and face Real Valladolid two weeks later before welcoming Bayern to the Camp Nou on April 8 for the first leg.

LJ Hooker

You're Wish To About To Come True!

- Three Bedrooms - Beachfront

Yes three bedrooms, two bathrooms plus a separate toilet.
Situated on the 15th level overlooking the beach.

- Relax on one of your two balconies.
- Enjoy fully tiled living areas - easy care
- Fully Furnished, ready for investment or live in
- Heart of Surfers Paradise, stroll to the beach or enjoy dining at one of many cafes.
- The Esplanade is a future millionaire's row

Inquire now

Adele Drennan 0418 766 712

View: Sat 14th April & 15th April Sun 12.00-12.45

Auction 16th April Crowne Plaza, Surfers Paradise at 6pm

nobody does it better

ljhooker.com